Early science fiction and occultism

Early Science Fiction and Occultism

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Declaration

I, Aren Roukema, declare that this thesis is all my own work.

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Abstract

This dissertation examines engagements between early science fiction (SF) and the body of modern esoteric theories and practices often described as 'occultism'. SF is often seen as an imaginative extension of secular, empiricist science — the cultural form furthest from magic and occult logic — but this research shows that science fiction shares many of the motivations and perspectives of occultism. It argues that SF developed some of its central tropes and stylistics from its nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century engagement with magical, mesmerist, Spiritualist, and Theosophical currents, particularly their attempts to legitimate the paranormal and supernatural by appealing to scientific discourse, methodology, and social authority. It also examines a reciprocal phenomenon of influence in which SF's tropes, themes, and imagined worlds have been enfolded into occult traditions and other alternative religious movements. Finally, this dissertation assesses how SF and occultism have been conjointly deployed to defend and communicate marginal scientific theories and religious systems.

This project develops a framework for analysing these intersections. It starts with case studies of three authors — Edward Bulwer-Lytton, Emma Hardinge Britten, and Marie Corelli — each of whom generated SF from earnest communication and exploration of occult scientific hypotheses in fiction. Each case study illustrates areas of intersection in which occultism and SF influenced each other's development, including a mutual affectation of scientific verisimilitude, naturalisation of the supernatural, a preference for hypothesis over fact, and projection of unknown forces and powers into the future. The final chapter expands scope to consider the network of occult and science fictional engagement from 1860 to 1926, illustrating further areas of intersection including an instinct for re-enchantment and a mediation of binaries constructed along the lines of science versus religion. Finally, it examines the esoteric heritage of several key tropes of science fiction: psionic powers, space exploration, and the extra-terrestrial.

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Abbreviations

GL — Emma Hardinge Britten, *Ghost Land; or, Researches into the Mysteries of Occultism* (Boston: 1876)

HH — Edward Bulwer-Lytton, *The Haunted and the Haunters, or, The House and the Brain* (Chicago: Rajput Press, 1911 (1859))

LE — Marie Corelli, *The Life Everlasting: A Reality of Romance* (London: Methuen, 1911)

Life — Victor Bulwer-Lytton, *The Life of Edward Bulwer, First Lord Lytton* (London: Macmillan, 1913)

ROTW — Marie Corelli, *A Romance of Two Worlds* (New York: Allison, 1887)

SBTA—Shakespeare Birthplace Trust Archive

SL — Marie Corelli, *The Soul of Lilith* (New York: American News, 1892)

SP — Marie Corelli, *The Secret Power: A Romance of the Time* (London: Methuen, 1921)

SS — Edward Bulwer-Lytton, *A Strange Story*, 2 vols (London: Sampson Low, 1862)

TCR — Edward Bulwer-Lytton, *The Coming Race* (New York: Mershon, 1900; 1871)

YD — Marie Corelli, *The Young Diana: An Experiment of the Future* (London: Hutchinson, 1918)

Chapter One

Enframing the Supernatural: Early Science Fiction and Occultism

One of science fiction's most generative dynamics has been its exploration of the liminal spaces between binaries of order and chaos, logic and madness, matter and spirit. Sliding freely between such poles, authors fuse scientific knowledge and method with magic and the supernatural, generating new worlds and ontologies while dialoguing with the frameworks and assumptions of this one. Science fiction's engagement with the metaphysical is exemplified by — and may be the result of — early science fiction (SF) texts of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries motivated by an urge to reconcile science and religion, growingly divided by epistemological battles over evolution and its ramifications, the limits of the natural world (and therefore of scientific inquiry), and the boundaries of the human self — its life after death, its possession of a soul, the potential psychic powers of the mind. Science fiction of this nature frequently engaged with a group of traditions which I will refer to as 'occultism', including mesmerism, Spiritualism, Theosophy, ritual magic, Freemasonry, and Rosicrucianism. Drawing on these traditions, early SF imagined astral travel through a galaxy populated by spirit beings and humans reincarnated as extra-terrestrials; envisioned the evolutionary potential of psychic powers like telepathy, clairvoyance and telekinesis; developed alternative scientific methodologies based on occultist challenges to empirical science; and conjured new combinations of matter and spirit which allowed creative ontologies and bizarre new worlds. In turn, the novels, stories, and eventually plays and films that resulted from this esoteric influence played a reciprocal role in shaping new occultist hypotheses and mythologies.

As this dissertation will illustrate, the engagement between science fiction and occultism in the period was frequent, sustained, and mutually informing. Moreover, it had lasting impacts on the rhetorics and tropes of science fiction and the development of new concepts in occultism. Yet, it has gone largely unobserved. Several dominant narratives within both academic criticism and wider perceptions of SF and occultism appear to be factors in this oversight. One is that science fiction is frequently seen as genre that did not truly come into its own until the twentieth century, particularly influenced by its definition and naming by *Amazing Stories* editor Hugo Gernsback.[1] Most SF historians observe important precursors to this 'marketing genre',[2] including the seventeenth-century moon voyage, antique mythology, utopian fiction, Romantic wonder,

[1] See Gernsback, 'A New Sort of Magazine'; Gernsback, 'Fiction Versus Facts', 291; Gernsback, 'Science Wonder Stories', p. 5. For contemporary critical examples see Westfahl, pp. 1, 8, 37–63; Hrotic, p. 26.

[2] Saler, *As If*, p. 14.

the gothic fascination with the abject and the sublime, and seminal works of particular nineteenth-century authors, particularly Jules Verne and H.G. Wells. The nineteenth century, particularly following 1870, is often described as an important period for the merging of a variety of sub-genres, including the gothic, lost race tales, and adventure stories, into something quite like science fiction and known, from the 1880s, as 'scientific romance'.[3] However, these earlier texts and currents are often understood as precursor forms of SF; it is frequently argued that authors in this period did not produce science fiction with a conscious awareness of participating in a particular genre.[4]

It is, however, clear that authors were consciously writing science fiction as early as the mid-nineteenth century, and that readers and critics were receiving it as such. In 1851 an essay by William Wilson actually used the term 'science fiction' in an essay arguing the enriching possibilities of a relationship between poetry and science.[5] In 1835 the term 'scientific novel' was used to describe Richard Adams Locke's *The Moon Hoax* as 'an entire new species of literature',[6] a term essentially repeated by Jules Verne, who referred to his novels as *romans scientifiques*, and by Gustavus W. Pope, who used it to label his 1894 novel, *Journey to Mars the Wonderful World* (p. 6). These early terminological references indicate an understanding of a specific literary form arising from the combination of science and imaginative prose. An early reviewer of Wells's *The War of the Worlds* (1897) traced the development of this 'quasi-scientific novel' to the mid-nineteenth century.[7] The reviewer noted the centrality of 'science and mechanics' to this half-century old genre, a connection that indeed seemed uppermost in the mind of Sydney Whiting in an 1851 preface to *Heliondé, or, Adventures in the Sun*, where he describes his fictional method as 'the imaginative and industrial faculties […] roped together in one team' (p. x).

This dissertation therefore operates on the principle that while SF certainly encountered an important clarification as a marketing genre in Gernsback's time, it should also be understood more broadly as a particular narrative 'mode',[8] a form of the fantastic in development since at least the rise of post-Enlightenment rationalism and empiricism, which produced a set of cultural binaries — matter vs spirit, science vs magic, disenchantment vs enchantment, reason vs imagination — each of which contains the generative antinomy present in the very conflation of 'science' and 'fiction'. There is much value in attempts by literary and cultural historians to trace the roots of science fiction to a particular period, context, author, or text. These efforts have

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[3] E.g., Seed, *Anticipations*, p. ix; Luckhurst, *Science Fiction*, pp. 11, 16.

[4] E.g., James, 'Science Fiction by Gaslight', p. 29; Rieder, pp. 25–26; Bould and Vint, p. 35; Hrotic, p. 53.

[5] Stableford, 'William Wilson's Prospectus for Science Fiction', 9–10.

[6] *The New York Herald*, 5 September 1835, qtd. in Westfahl, p. 21.

[7] Anonymous, 'Review of *The War of the Worlds*', *Critic*, April 1898, qtd. in Rose, p. 6.

[8] See Aldiss and Wingrove, pp. 14–15; Broderick, *Reading by Starlight*, p. 37; Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, p. 2; Seed, *Science Fiction*, p. 1.

resulted in a variety of convincing origin stories: George Slusser notes very early examples, including Arthur C. Clarke's discovery of SF elements in Homer's *Odyssey* and the location of SF in *The Epic of Gilgamesh* by Pierre Versins, based on its combination of literature and rational conjecture.[9] These views may seem outlandish, but SF author and critic Judith Merril assumed that readers of her 1966 article in *Extrapolations* would agree by 'common consent' with a timeline that stretched from Lucian and Plato.[10] SF has also been traced to various points in the nineteenth century. Gernsback identified stories by Edgar Allan Poe, Verne, and Wells as prototypical of the genre.[11] Brian Aldiss identifies SF as an outgrowth of the gothic that can be traced to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*,[12] and a group of scholars see the 1870s as a point of emergence, observing the influence of Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *The Coming Race* and George Chesney's 'The Battle of Dorking',[13] both published in 1871. Each of these theories contributes to our understanding of how SF has developed in relation to other genres and to various historical and intellectual contexts. The only real lesson to be drawn from these competing historiographies, however, is that science fiction — whatever it is — is in continual flux, marked by characteristics specific to different time periods.

Both genre and mode experienced this flux after Gernsback as well. The pulp scene of the 1920s and 1930s was a fairly obscure, specifically American movement, but by 1940, about the middle of what is often called SF's 'Golden Age', there were at least a dozen SF magazines, including *Amazing*, edited by Ray Palmer, and *Astounding Science Fiction*, edited by John W. Campbell, who mentored some of SF's most iconic authors, including Isaac Asimov, Robert Heinlein, and A.E. van Vogt.[14] This American boom was paralleled in Europe by important SF works like Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927), Olaf Stapledon's *Starmaker* (1937), and George Orwell's *1984* (1949), produced without concern for the 'new' American genre. In the 1950s SF experienced what Mark Rose calls a 'broadening of the thematic range',[15] in which the genre is seen to have expanded its focus from extrapolating scientific knowledge and projecting future technologies, though Golden Age pulps like *Amazing* had already been perpetuating the wide thematic range already found in early SF.[16] A 1960s 'New Wave' led by authors like J.G. Ballard, Michael Moorcock, and Judith Merril continued to move away from the adventure stories of the

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[9] Slusser, p. 27.

[10] Merril, p. 59. Originally published in *Extrapolations*.

[11] Gernsback, 'A New Sort of Magazine'.

[12] Aldiss and Wingrove, pp. 16–17.

[13] Rose, p. 9; James, 'Science Fiction by Gaslight', p. 37; Rieder, pp. 25–26.

[14] There are many histories of SF which chronicle these periodic developments. For some of the best see Luckhurst*, Science Fiction*; Bould and Vint; Roberts, *History of Science Fiction*.

[15] Rose, p. 9.

[16] See Bould and Vint, pp. 74–76.

pulps toward greater literary experimentation and aesthetic focus. This experimentation led to increased hybridisation, eventually resulting in a variety of individually identifiable sub-genres such as space opera and cyberpunk. This multivalent expansion was accompanied by its transition onto all possible media platforms — SF can be found in venues from theatres to streaming platforms, enchants children's books, adds futuristic cadence to modern poetry, lays down synth tracks in electronic dance music, and provides cosmic frameworks for role-playing and video games. From graphic novels to advertisements, SF has permeated ever further into various cultures and subcultures worldwide, to the degree that critics have observed its transition into a particular form of thinking or experiencing, a narrative framework with which the modern self encounters technoscientific ideas and experiences.[17]

Viewing SF as a structure for perception and experience captures the subjectivity behind the reception of any text, event, or image as science fictional. Though SF's development can be structured in phases as in the twentieth-century schema above, ultimately it becomes something different with the publication of each new novel written or marketed as SF, and, indeed, with each new claim that a text — either current or from an earlier era — is science fictional. In light of the multiplicity of SF, Mark Bould and Sherryl Vint have argued that 'there is no such *thing* as SF', that it is always better to speak in terms of 'science fictions' resultant from specific historical developments and subjective interpretations.[18] We must avoid moving too far toward relativism, lest we lose sight of the fact that in the minds of authors, readers, viewers, editors, and even critics there remains an intertextually shaped *something* that *is* SF. There remains an aspect of consensus construction to our idea of science fiction as well, perhaps best conceived in terms of what author/critic Damien Broderick calls SF's 'mega-text', a living canon of texts, tropes, and intertextually upheld assumptions that shapes our considerations of what SF has been and helps to chart and define what it will become.[19] This mega-text can never be understood ahistorically, however. SF never establishes itself as a uniform, timeless object. The multiple science fictions to which Bould and Vint refer are created and destroyed and created and destroyed in a literary equivalent to the first law of thermodynamics. As with the conservation of energy, there does seem to be an (ultimately indefinable) mega-text that stretches over centuries and contains the assemblage of tropes, themes, landscapes, symbols, and stylistics that has, since Gernsback, been called science fiction. However, in seeking to characterise this overarching way of thinking, writing, and experiencing, we must remain aware of the ongoing flux within the mega-text, the historical specificity of the micro-genres birthing and dying in chaotic gasps of subjective

[17] See pp. 220–21.
[18] Bould and Vint, p. 1.
[19] Broderick, *Reading by Starlight*, p. xiii. Cf. Seed, *Science Fiction*, p. 130.

production and interpretation. In order to understand SF as a wider phenomenon, we can only proceed with careful historical and textual analysis, aware of the individuality and specificity of cultural products that contain, exemplify, manipulate, or depend upon an SF narrative mode.

SF critics have attempted definitions of SF as both genre and mode, but have been notoriously unable to reach consensus. If any point of agreement has been reached, however, it is that SF is a form of the fantastic that reflects the empiricist frameworks and secular materialist priorities of modern science. Building from Gernsback's definition of SF as 'stories that have their basis in scientific laws as we know them, or in the logical deduction of new laws from what we know',[20] theorists have offered many variations on this theme, often incorporating technological development as well.[21] Perhaps the most impactful of these has been Darko Suvin's definition of SF as a literature of 'cognitive estrangement': stories with a fantastic setting (estrangement) that are yet limited in device and theme by scientific knowledge (cognition).[22] Suvin bases his equally influential concept of the 'novum' on this definition — a novel scientific or technological concept, setting, character, or invention which dominates the narrative (the appearance of a single laser gun does not make a text SF) and is validated by 'scientifically methodical cognition'.[23]

Suvin's ideas about how science fiction emerges as a unique genre form have been influential for a reason — his definition nicely captures the tension between fantastic wonder and the logical, empiricist frameworks on which SF thrives. Cognitive estrangement, however, is limited by a second factor that has obscured SF's interaction with occultism; like many other approaches to SF, it fails to recognise the complex layers of signification, contested methodologies, and competing theories that constitute science. The dialogue with scientific knowledge is certainly a core aspect of science fiction, but, as this dissertation will reinforce, the scientific process is subject to social, cultural, and intellectual fluctuations in method and theory, often with several approaches vying for dominance at the same time. There has thus never been, particularly in the nineteenth century, a homogenous scientific method or body of knowledge against which science fiction could easily define itself vis a vis other genres of the fantastic. It is thus, as Bould and Vint have argued, 'ideological and cultural investments', rather than an actual consanguinity with established scientific fact, that guide the reception of a particular work as science fictional or not.[24] Ironically, research that has argued SF's reliance on scientific empiricism may represent a failure of empirical method.

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[20] Gernsback, 'Science Wonder Stories'.

[21] See, e.g., Aldiss and Wingrove, pp. 14, 25; Le Guin, 'Introduction', p. 23; Parrinder, 'Science Fiction and the Scientific World-View', p. 68; Csicsery-Ronay, p. 4.

[22] Suvin, *Metamorphoses*, pp. 47–56.

[23] Ibid. p. 66. On the novum, see pp. 64–84.

[24] Bould and Vint, p. 37. Cf. Csicsery-Ronay, p. 111; Luckhurst, 'Many Deaths', p. 44; Luckhurst, 'Pseudoscience', p. 404.

The exorcism of science fiction's demons

Despite the complex, contested, historically fluctuating nature of scientific knowledge, readers and critics quite naturally, perhaps unavoidably, privilege the scientific knowledge of their own time when encountering a text as science fictional (or not). A mega-textual approach to understanding SF is thus made difficult by the decaying scientificity of outmoded methods and hypotheses. Nineteenth-century texts which develop novums out of theories which possessed scientific validity in their own time but which have since been relegated to the dustbin of intellectual history, are often overlooked — and sometimes aggressively denounced — as contributors to the SF mega-text by readers and critics affected by a presentist scientific perspective,[25] while texts more harmonious with the epistemologies of later periods, particularly those of Verne and Wells, are accentuated.[26] This historiographical imbalance has obscured the occult roots that continue to wind their way to the very crown of the science fictional tree.

A third obstacle to unveiling these occult roots is thus that magical and esoteric phenomena have frequently played the role of science fiction's other. As part of SF's claim to scientism, its authors, readers, editors, and critics have participated in a de-occultation of the fantastic, insisting that science fiction is distinguished from other genres by its exorcism of magical thinking, concept, and causality. The engineer has displaced the wizard in this constructed binary; blood-stained ritual altars have been smashed to make room for the clean, empiricist spaces of the laboratory. The most well-known example of this approach remains Suvin's explicit contrast of the 'scientifically methodical cognition' of SF with magic and the supernatural.[27] For historian of nineteenth-century SF Paul Alkon, SF can only exist 'when it is possible to distinguish […] between natural and supernatural as realms that very differently create "the interest of the story."'[28] Author Stanislaw Lem insists that 'in science fiction there can be no inexplicable marvels, no transcendence, no devils or demons.'[29] These positions follow — and are built upon — Gernsback's restriction of SF to 'scientific laws as we know them', and Wells's 1933 claim to have inaugurated a new form of fiction in the 1890s, by replacing the 'jiggery-pokery magic' that had previously animated the fantastic with 'an ingenious use of scientific patter'.[30] As this dissertation will make clear, many authors before Wells made similar 'ingenious use of scientific

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[25] On the historiographic problems of such presentism see Willis, *Mesmerists, Monsters, and Machines*, p. 17; Luckhurst, 'Pseudoscience'.

[26] See, e.g., Evans, 'The Beginnings', pp. 39–40; Chernysheva, p. 35; Amis, pp. 28–34.

[27] Suvin, *Metamorphoses*, pp. 66–69.

[28] Alkon, p. 2. Alkon is quoting the preface to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818).

[29] Lem, *Microworlds*, p. 35. Assertions that SF is exclusive to magic and religion are legion. For a few more examples see Scholes, p. 46; Purtill, p. 32; Aldiss and Wingrove, pp. 39–40, 51, 70.

[30] Wells, 'Preface', np.

patter', yet the premise behind his claim to invention has been frequently emphasised.[31] As David Seed argues, distinguishing SF from fantasy in such a manner 'reflects a secularist ideology which has by no means been consistently central to science fiction',[32] yet critics have frequently clarified a rational, secular-materialist science fiction against a genre of magical, pre-modern fantasy.[33] Other more nuanced approaches have attempted to consign SF that displays magical, supernatural, and other ostensibly non-'cognitive' elements to sub-genres of 'science-fantasy',[34] or 'sci-fi',[35] but these only perpetuate the ideological goal of maintaining a pure, empiricist form of SF untainted by the natural rivals of an equally homogeneous science.

These dichotomous approaches to SF have not gone unchallenged. Luckhurst has shown that a variety of knowledges now relegated to the status of 'pseudoscience' have long been used to generate science fiction.[36] He argues that parapsychological phenomena like telepathy and ESP have been of particular interest. For the authors of *The Science in Science Fiction* (1982) these are part of a range of 'mysterious mental powers' which mediate the rejected knowledge of occultism in SF, though only discursively: 'magic sounds so much more convincing when we call it "paraphysics"'.[37] Responding to Adam Roberts's argument that SF excises the pre-Reformation and pre-Enlightenment worldviews of Catholicism, Brian Baker has shown that the dialectic between hidden, esoteric knowledge and exoteric science has proven a generative tension in subgenres like steampunk and the Lovecraftian Weird, while even the figure of Satan, and demonology in general, has been useful for authors like James Blish and Gene Wolfe.[38] A number of scholars, focusing on twentieth-century authors including Roger Zelazny, Frank Herbert, Ray Palmer, and Philip K. Dick, have observed that while SF does tend to reject organised, dogmatic religion, it is persistently attracted to more alternative currents, including pantheism, Buddhism, Gnosticism, and New Age spirituality.[39]

The many intersections between SF and occultism in the nineteenth century, however, have gone largely uninterrogated. An important exception is Susan Stone-Blackburn's 'Consciousness Evolution and Early Telepathic Tales' (1993), which explores the overwhelming interest in psychic powers found in early texts by authors including Edward Bellamy and Edward Bulwer-Lytton.

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[31] See, e.g., Heinlein, 'Science Fiction', pp. 18–19; Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, pp. xxii–xxiii, 2; Clark, p. 96; Le Guin, p. 26; Csicsery-Ronay, p. 113; Todorov, p. 56.

[32] Seed, *Science Fiction*, p. 122.

[33] E.g. Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, p. xxi; Evans, 'The Beginnings', p. 29; Alkon, p. 30.

[34] Suvin, *Metamorphoses*, p. 68.

[35] Csicsery-Ronay, p. 75; Parrinder, 'Science Fiction and the Scientific World-View', p. 87.

[36] Luckhurst, 'Pseudoscience', p. 405. Cf. Enns, 'Pseudoscience', pp. 498–512.

[37] Nicholls and others, p. 168.

[38] Baker, pp. 478–91.

[39] See, e.g., Kripal, *Authors of the Impossible*; Kripal, *Mutants and Mystics*; List; Woodman, pp. 124–25; Possamai and Lee.

Stone-Blackburn observes that little attention has been paid to psychic tropes in SF because their connections to occultism and, later, to the New Age, are an uncomfortable fit with the 'widespread conviction' that SF must exemplify a materialist episteme.[40] Even Stone-Blackburn, however, remains rooted in binary thinking, concluding that what she calls 'psience fiction' acknowledges the centrality of science in Western culture, but 'resist[s] its limits, critiquing science itself' (p. 249). Nachman Ben-Yehuda reaches a similar conclusion regarding the function of SF and occultism following the 1960s.[41]

Adam Roberts has developed the most sustained theorisation of SF as a genre determined by its relation to magic. Roberts's ideas exemplify the quality of insight that can be gained from carefully situating science fictional texts within historical and philosophical context. For Roberts, science fiction is generated from a tension between magic and science that arose in Western culture as a result of the Protestant Reformation. SF is thus the result of 'a cultural dialectic between "Protestant" rationalist post-Copernican science', which Roberts also calls a 'de-magicked deism', and '"Catholic" theology, magic and mysticism,' or 'magical pantheism'.[42] Crucially, Roberts does not align SF solely with a non-magical, rationalist pole; rather, he places most SF texts between this 'crude binary' (p. xii). 'SF texts mediate these cultural determinants with different emphases, some more strictly materialist, some more mystical and magical' (p. 19). Following from this important identification of the continuing importance of magic to SF, Roberts makes two more crucial points. First, this dialectic is no mere historical object. Rather, 'present-day SF is still being influenced substantively by the determining cultural dialectic out of which it arose four centuries ago.' Second, without awareness of this dialectic, 'many aspects of the tradition of SF are incomprehensible' (p. xv).

I share this conviction, and I aim, for the period between Edward Bulwer-Lytton and Gernsback at least, to make the history of SF more comprehensible, raising awareness of forgotten texts, authors, and concepts as I do so. However, I will also add specific cultural and historical complexity to Roberts's understanding of the dialectic between magic and science. Roberts productively relaxes the binary thinking usually used to differentiate science fiction from fantasy, but his perception of the way in which SF enfolds contesting magical and scientific perspectives ends up maintaining much of the original structure of this binary. 'Protestant' technological and scientific elements are viewed as generating a 'materialist' SF, while the 'mysterious', 'numinous', and magical phenomena of 'Catholic SF' result in 'science fiction figured as Fantasy' (p. xii). Roberts problematically concludes that the 'mystical' and 'quasi-religious'

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[40] Stone-Blackburn, p. 241.
[41] Ben-Yehuda, esp. pp. 1, 10–13.
[42] Roberts, *History of Science Fiction*, pp. 3, 19.

elements in SF 'insist upon one and only one interpretation of the cosmos', and thus result in fictions different from the 'more fully scientific' fiction of post-Protestant, materialist SF (p. 19).

This project approaches the generative function of magic within SF with a more careful historical approach that acknowledges the specificity of the various traditions which have espoused occult thinking and practice, in this case in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Roberts's theory assumes the existence of dichotomised bodies of knowledge out there in the 'real' worlds of intellectual history or culture, constructed by various polemics within an internecine religious conflict. It is in science fiction, not in real-world culture, science, or religion, that Roberts finds the messy, productive entanglements between poles of magic and science. In this dissertation, however, I will show that occultists, as much as science fiction writers, have attempted to frame the supernatural, the numinous, and the mysterious within a logically consistent, naturalistic framework, one which frequently dialogues with the methods and assumptions of empirical science. When magic makes its way into science fiction, therefore, it often does so in a form that has already sought scientific legitimacy outside the pages of whatever story it comes to occupy. We will, in fact, encounter several texts in this dissertation in which SF has been produced by authors seeking to use fiction to explore and communicate such occult scientific concepts. There is no dialectic between magic and science in such cases (in the eyes of the author and some readers anyway) because the occult knowledge in question is seen as valid science.

Despite its generative role in science fiction, occultism has been a central target in what Luckhurst calls 'a war on superstition, magical thinking, and any argument made from tradition or unexamined authority.'[43] Exorcisms of science fiction's demons, so to speak, have been impactful, resulting in critical boundary work that, as Luckhurst observes, tends to 'jettison much of the content of the genre'.[44] Early science fiction has been particularly affected by such prescriptive purifications, which aggressively project the scientific frameworks of their own time onto SF of the period. Suvin uses his distinction between science and magic to exorcise a great number of nineteenth-century texts in *Victorian Science Fiction in the UK* (1983),[45] and elsewhere derides the work of Bulwer-Lytton and Marie Corelli as 'a proto-Fascist revulsion against modern civilization, materialist rationalism, and such […] organized around an ideology unchecked by any cognition […]. If SF exists at all, this is not it.'[46] Similarly, Todorov, speaking specifically of the nineteenth century in his structuralist approach to the fantastic, identifies the period's 'scientific

[43] Luckhurst, 'Pseudoscience', p. 403. Cf. Stone-Blackburn, p. 241.

[44] Luckhurst, 'Pseudoscience', p. 404.

[45] This book built on previously published articles. See Suvin, 'On What Is and Is Not an SF Narration; Suvin, 'Seventy-Four More Victorian Books That Should Be Excluded'.

[46] Suvin, *Metamorphoses*, p. 69.

marvellous' as specifically precluding objects and tropes that are magical or 'serve to communicate with other worlds'.[47] Paul Alkon's *Science Fiction before 1900* (1994) does not mention occultism and sees SF as driven by 'perspectives not duplicated by tales of the supernatural based on elves, ghosts, magic, or the like' (p. 6). Alkon follows Bruce Franklin and Kingsley Amis in differentiating between real science fiction like that of Verne and the diverging works of Poe, which are, because of their 'visionary' characteristics, branded by David Ketterer as 'marginally science-fictional'.[48]

Such exorcisms are contrasted by scholars including Roberts, Luckhurst, Everett Bleiler, and Patrick Brantlinger, who, practicing historical contextualisation rather than prescriptive projection, have acknowledged the mega-textual significance of texts generated by occult scientific methods or phenomena.[49] As Thomas Clareson notes, 'to ignore them entirely would be to overlook deliberately one of the chief intellectual debates of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: namely, the attempts of writers (and their readers) to reconcile […] traditional philosophical and religious beliefs in terms that would subsume the new scientific theories and findings.'[50] What has not yet been elaborated by these scholars, however, is why occultism and its strange sciences proved useful for generating an SF mode; how SF was shaped by its engagement with occultism in the crucial decades of its development from amorphous form to clarified marketing genre; and how SF, in turn, inspired and influenced new generations of occult thinkers. This dissertation explores a number of areas of intersection between SF and occultism, identifying some of the central tropes and rhetorical strategies which emerged from this engagement and which continue to generate SF to this day. In order to accomplish this, I situate early science fiction with the occult scientific methods and discourses of the day, as I believe it may be the absence of such analysis in the historiographies of both occultism and science fiction — and indeed of nineteenth-century science and culture in general — that has obscured their vital interaction.

The problems that emerge from this absence of detailed historical criticism become clear when we look closely at two examples of scholars who have very admirably highlighted the importance of occult movements to early SF. The first is also the earliest example of sustained SF criticism I have found. Dorothy Scarborough dedicates an entire chapter of *The Supernatural in Modern English Fiction* (1917) to exploring what she calls 'scientific supernaturalism', or 'scientific ghostliness' (pp. 266–67). This 'scientific fictive supernaturalism' 'is concrete in its

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[47] Todorov, p. 56.

[48] Alkon, pp. 105–06; David Ketterer, *New Worlds for Old*, p. 57.

[49] Roberts, *History of Science Fiction*, pp. 113, 116. Luckhurst, 'Pseudoscience', pp. 409–10; Bleiler, p. xii; Brantlinger, 'Victorian Science Fiction', pp. 371–73.

[50] Clareson, *Science Fiction in America,* p. xi.

effects, not spiritual […]. The form shows how clear, cold intelligence plays with miracles and applies the supernatural to daily life […], for supernaturalism imposed on material things produces an effect of verisimilitude not gained in the realm of pure spirit' (p. 280). Scarborough's delimitation of scientific supernatural fiction is critically important. Free from the genre-defining de-occultation of SF to come, she unproblematically identifies science fiction as a form of supernatural fiction, one which differentiates itself not by eschewing the paranormal and spiritual, but by encountering it within a particular modernised and naturalised frame. From this particular 1917 perspective, *science fiction was magic*.

Yet, her description maintains a number of binaries which actual scientists and/or occultists attempting to discover the naturalistic properties of the supernatural would have found quite alien. Scarborough's perception of scientific supernaturalism continues to strongly differentiate between the material world and a supernatural of 'pure spirit'. As we have seen, this is also a flaw in Roberts's otherwise insightful observations regarding the magic–science dialectic on which SF thrives. His identification of a popular nineteenth-century category of 'mystical science fiction' flows from this perpetuated binary. Authors who produced SF in this 'mystical' category, including Bulwer-Lytton, Corelli, and French astronomer and Spiritualist Camille Flammarion, did not, like Roberts, see 'the late century craze for psychic phenomena' as an 'anti-Enlightenment reaction' (pp. 107–08). For these authors, particularly Flammarion, who merged astronomy and Spiritualism in a scientific method that really cannot be parsed, as Roberts does, into 'mystical' and 'scientific' dimensions (p. 113), the findings of Spiritualism and psychical research were just as empirically and naturalistically viable as those of other scientific pursuits. From the standpoint of many in the period, the astral or soul travel which these authors used to explore space was just as scientifically plausible as more techno-material modes of travel, such as Verne's cannon-powered astronautics in *De la Terre à la Lune* (*From the Earth to the Moon*—1865) or Percy Greg's anti-gravitational 'apergy' in *Across the Zodiac* (1880). There are, moreover, plenty of innovative novums generated within these novels that are more evidently consistent with even the most rigid technoscientific frameworks. Corelli's novels, for example, feature novums including electric doorbells, invisible ink, perpetual energy, and the automatic slide-up doors found on many a Golden Age spaceship.[51]

Consigning such texts to a separate sub-genre similar to 'science-fantasy' is thus more representative of ideological discomfort than historically conscious accuracy. To be clear, this is a discomfort I share. It is enormously difficult to look past the present, and equally challenging for non-occultists to put ourselves in such alternative epistemological shoes. To be fair, however, to

[51] See *ROTW*, pp. 47, 163; *SP*, p. 93.

the texts and authors or concepts and thinkers of the past, we must make the attempt. We may find, in the process, that there are various strategies which have been used by both occultists and authors of fiction to comfortably situate magical, occult, or supernatural concepts within scientific frameworks. We may find, in other words, that Arthur C. Clarke's famous dictum that 'any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic' can work both ways.

Describing science fiction

Todorov notes that genre-based interpretation is 'a continual oscillation between the description of phenomena and abstract theory'.[52] Indeed, there is a problem of circular logic in my attempt to draw attention to authors and texts that have not previously been understood as significant to SF: in order to identify a particular nineteenth-century occult-infused text as science fictional, I need to approach it with somewhat defined ideas of what both science fiction and occultism are; conversely, however, in arguing for the lost contextual significance of the particular text under analysis, I implicitly incorporate its features in forming the very definition with which I approach it. This is not, I think, a completely surmountable problem, but there are good reasons to proceed anyway, while remaining aware of the somewhat irreducible relationship between description and prescription in any analysis of identity or genre. First of all, both SF and occultism lack consensus definitions with which to proceed; indeed, all critical research of genre and tradition shares this problem of circular logic. This does not mean, however, that it is not worthwhile. Second, no one is going to fully share the perspective from which I assess these movements. As we have seen, science fiction is subject to a continuous process of intersubjective genre construction, while occultism means something quite different to the various parties who participate in constructing its images and meanings, including academics, practitioners and believers from various backgrounds and traditions, and cultural producers like SF authors. However, I invite the reader to absorb or reject individual arguments and findings without invalidating the project as a whole. Third, with this problem in mind, I do not intend my arguments and characterisations as a dismissal of other views of what science fiction and occultism are or do. I am more interested in adding to existing perspectives — expanding awareness of the cultural and intellectual exchanges that have helped to shape both traditions.

I cannot claim, however, to have no desire to persuade. I want to encourage readers and critics to be open to the incredibly expansive range of scientific theories and methods which SF embraces, and, conversely to show scholars of esoteric and alternative religious movements just

[52] Todorov, p. 21.

how long, and with how many facets, the cosmic imagination of science fiction has been impacting these traditions. As such, it is only fair that I briefly sketch an outline of occultism in the period, and clarify the perception of science fiction which has evolved from my encounter with both early and later SF.

Turning first to science fiction, I agree with the vast majority of critics that the most essential characteristic of both mode and genre is an eponymous relationship between science and fiction. However, I cannot agree with those who argue that SF's plausibility structures are empirically or rationally sound, or that its strange hypotheses do not extrapolate existing knowledge out of sight of known scientific laws. I tend to find the most critical value in perspectives which argue that science fiction is not necessarily limited by 'scientifically methodical cognition', but that it does enable the reader to encounter the widest possible range of phenomena as though it were. Luckhurst, for example, persuasively argues that SF mirrors the 'generalized effect on the lifeworld' wrought by the socio-cultural impacts of 'Mechanism' — the accelerated technological change that has ruptured all aspects of life in industrialised societies since the mid to late nineteenth century.[53] Similarly, Ursula Le Guin observes that SF responds not just to the content or mythos of science and technology, but to its 'mind-set'.[54] Building on these conceptions, I follow Roberts in observing the relevance of Martin Heidegger's concept of 'enframing' to the question of how SF shapes a reading experience to accord with the 'mind-set' with which moderns encounter technological and epistemic rupture.

Roberts argues that SF can be better understood as a technoscientific form of fiction if 'technology' is understood in Heidegger's terms, where it is not simply a set of tools under human control, but 'a mode of "Enframing" the world'.[55] Heidegger understands technology as a 'challenging' (*Herausfordem*) which demands energy and resources from nature and then stores these as a 'standing-reserve' from which these energies can be extracted for other mechanical purposes. Despite our illusion to the contrary, humans have no control over this challenging — we too are commanded to take part in the ordering of the real, or nature, as standing-reserve.[56] Left, then, with a paradoxical cycle in which man is perceived to create technology but actually is commanded by it, Heidegger proposes that there is something more primal than technology that calls man forth to order the real. This is a gathering to order, or 'enframing' (*Gestell*).[57] Roberts is interested in how enframing expands the perspective of SF as 'technology fiction' (p. 12). I want to expand this application further to focus on the implications of enframing for human existential

[53] Luckhurst, *Science Fiction*, p. 3.
[54] Le Guin, p. 23.
[55] Roberts, *History of Science Fiction*, p. 18.
[56] Heidegger, pp. 16–18.
[57] Ibid. p. 19.

perspective. SF is not limited to any particular form of knowledge or way of knowing. It is capable of enfolding virtually all concepts and images that humanity has ever thought. It separates itself from other forms of the fantastic, however, by revealing these concepts in a manner consistent with enframing. Heidegger observes that humans are generally unaware of *Gestell*, it 'threatens to sweep man away into ordering as the supposed single way of revealing' (p. 32), while simultaneously obscuring its manner and act of doing so.

I want to project Heidegger's formulation of enframing outward — while lessening its aura of critique — to note that it is not just technology, but the wider techno-scientific enterprise that has participated in the challenging and ordering of enframing. Roberts extends Heidegger's ideas to argue that it is 'the mystical, the quasi-religious that "enframes" in the limiting and "ordering" manner deplored by Heidegger' (p. 19), but for me the situation is completely opposite. Modern mystical and magical concepts can certainly, as Roberts notes, insist on 'one and only one interpretation of the cosmos' (p. 19), but one of the primary things that occultism and SF have in common is that they have been extraordinarily defined by the ordering of a range of related post-Enlightenment epistemological currents, including positivism, empiricism, naturalism, materialism, rationalism, and mechanism. These currents of enframing have, for better or for worse, insisted on a particular 'ordering attitude and behaviour';[58] indeed, because of the epistemic dominance of these currents, all theories, traditions, practices, and experiences are called to define themselves in relation to them, whether in consanguinity or subversion, if they wish to remain epistemologically current. Occultism, more than other religious traditions, and SF, more than other fantasy genres, have responded to this call. Their central purposes and modes of revealing have been shaped in the process.

Science fiction, it could be argued, would not be possible without enframing. Science fiction is one result of the calling to order of the fantastic imagination. Most fantastic genres, forms, and modes have responded in some way to enframing, but SF represents a form in which it is particularly crucial that knowledge claims appear naturalistically viable, empirically explainable, or traceable to some material cause. Crucially, however, appearance is all that matters. The novums and events of SF need not be plausible, rational, or material; they must simply affect a sense of verisimilitude consistent with the currents of enframing. As Carl Freedman observes — productively loosening Suvin's restrictive formulation of cognitive estrangement — it is not 'scientific cognition' that typifies SF's bizarre glimpses of unknown futures and spaces, so much as a 'cognition effect'. The critical aspect in identifying a text as science fictional is therefore not an 'epistemological judgment external to the text' but 'the attitude *of the text itself* to the kind of

[58] Heidegger, p. 21

estrangements being performed.'[59] The SF mode obscures the implausibility and magicity of a range of events and novums, creating a cognitive effect that satisfies the epistemic demands of enframing. This emphasis on verisimilitude over plausibility is particularly important for understanding early science fiction. While later authors have sometimes consciously worked to ensure actual scientific plausibility for their novums, thus creating what is often called 'hard' science fiction, nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century authors rarely seem to have felt any such compulsion.

This verisimilitude consistent with the currents of enframing is the most important characteristic of SF, but there are many others. SF is frequently identified by the presence of certain tropes, including space and time travel, extra-terrestrials and their civilisations, artificial intelligence, enhanced mental powers such as telepathy and telekinesis, and futuristic technology. It also has common themes, including the encounter with the unknown and irreducibly other, future prophecy, utopia or dystopia, alternative political or economic systems, evolution, and human transcendence of material limitations, usually via scientific discovery. The identifiability of a text or aspect of a text as science fictional seems to be strengthened by a mutually imbricating constellation of these tropes and themes. The intentions of author, publisher, and reader are also central, as I have already described in terms of the mega-text. In this sense, SF is what fans point to when they say, 'That's science fiction!',[60] 'what SF writers write is SF',[61] and, 'Sf is what is marketed as sf'.[62] It is also identifiable on a stylistic level. SF creates its cognitive effect by mimicking scientific discourse and neologism, by framing its imaginary worlds naturalistically, and by affecting empirical method via character perspective or story arc. Very often SF authors put more effort into imagining worlds and novums than they put into character development, leading to the identification of science fiction as stories with the 'idea as hero'.[63] In the course of this dissertation I will show how many of these tropes, themes, and stylistics brought SF and occultism together in the nineteenth-century, with lasting effects for both.

As noted, it is most pragmatic to evaluate SF as a 'mode', or, in Freedman's terms, an 'element', or 'tendency',[64] particularly since science fiction is often one ingredient among many in generically hybrid texts, especially in the early period with which I am concerned.[65] As a mode

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[59] Freedman, *Critical Theory and Science Fiction*, p. 18.

[60] Attributed to SF author Frederic Pohl. See Hollinger, p. 141.

[61] Card, p. 11.

[62] James, *Science Fiction in the Twentieth Century*, p. 3. James sees this only as an entry point in identifying SF.

[63] Amis, p. 118.

[64] Freedman, 'Science Fiction and Critical Theory', pp. 181–82.

[65] See Luckhurst, 'Many Deaths', pp. 41–42; Rieder, p. 30.

SF has, especially in the last half-century, also become a way of thinking and speaking, a form of dialogue and encounter with the world defined by the intellectual and perceptual demands of enframing. Seen in this sense, science fiction becomes culturally recognisable and important because of what it *does* as much as what it *is.* Alkon and Luckhurst have described SF's role in defining the modern subject's encounters with new technologies, especially those related to war, space travel, and ecological disaster.[66] Even more broadly, SF allows the human subject to encounter phenomena that appear unknown and alien within a framework that *makes sense* to those who feel called to order their perception in a manner consistent with enframing. As a result of this function, as I argue extensively in this dissertation, SF has emerged as a modern myth-space which mediates perceived antinomies of superstition and reason, religion and science, ancient and modern, enchantment and disenchantment, intangible and tangible, subjective and objective, esoteric and exoteric.

Describing occultism

Science fiction thus mediates interrelations between the currents of enframing and their estranged, abjected others — magical, supernatural, and spiritual phenomena. The same can be said of occultism, another movement that requires a cautious approach to definition. The term is sometimes used by scholars of esotericism to denote a modern tradition of ritual magic, but my understanding of 'occultism' in this project encapsulates a wider shift in theory and practice among esoteric traditions in the nineteenth century, including mesmerism, Spiritualism, and Theosophy. My reasons for this expanded use of the term are twofold: first, it reflects a common usage in the period by esoteric thinkers such as Theosophical Society founder Madame Helena Petrovna Blavatsky,[67] though its meaning and deployment were often contested. Second, approaches to alternative scientific and religious phenomena in the period which attempt to differentiate occultism from Spiritualism, Theosophy, and other affiliated movements invariably end up eliding the many intersections, shared priorities, and even shared memberships that connected them.[68] Though these traditions certainly had distinct views and characteristics, discussing them in terms of an 'occultist' whole allows me to better conceptualise the relationship between SF and this group of modern esoteric traditions brought together by shared ontologies and epistemological priorities.

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[66] Alkon, pp. 8–9; Luckhurst, *Science Fiction*, p. 10.

[67] See, e.g., Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine*, I, 619.

[68] On this difficulty of differentiation, discussed in terms of more recent traditions, see Partridge, I, 68–70.

Mesmerism, arguably the most influential nineteenth-century occult movement, did not begin as a secretive or rejected form of knowledge. In developing his science of 'animal magnetism', Franz Anton Mesmer drew from a variety of sources, including the early modern natural philosophy of Hermetic thinkers like Paracelsus, Robert Fludd, and Jan Baptist van Helmont.[69] However, he obscured this magical heritage in his doctoral thesis on animal magnetism, a subtle fluid which he believed to permeate all matter, and in a new range of medical treatments he introduced to Paris in 1778. He believed that imbalances of the animal magnetic fluid within the body resulted in disease, and taught a variety of healing techniques, usually involving a rebalancing of the body's magnetism via an application of will by an agent with a strong, balanced fluidic makeup.[70] Mesmer's techniques sometimes caused a trance state in which he himself was not much interested, but which was the focus of his mesmerist successors, particularly the Marquis de Puységur, whose discovery of methods for triggering the trance state revolutionised mesmerism and heavily influenced later theories of magical praxis and mediumship, while also leading to the development of hypnotism and psychoanalysis. Mesmerist ideas did not really catch on in the English-speaking world until the 1830s, when Baron Dupotet de Sennevoy influenced John Elliotson, a well-known medical doctor, to incorporate mesmerist healing into his practice at University College Hospital, London,[71] while in America public presentations by itinerant lecturer Charles Poyen St. Sauveur resulted in a surge of interest that would come to define the teachings of the founder of Christian Science, Mary Baker Eddy, and of the medium Andrew Jackson Davis.[72]

By the middle of the nineteenth century mesmerism had been largely rejected by the scientific and medical communities, but it continued to exercise significant influence on occult movements. Spiritualism was preeminent among these. Its origins are usually traced to attempts by the spirit of a pedlar to communicate, via a series of knocks and rappings, with two young mediums, Maggie and Kate Fox, in Hydesville, New York in 1848. Spirit communication was already an established phenomenon, occurring in mesmerist trance states, American Shaker communities, and the Swedenborgian trance experiences of Andrew Jackson Davis.[73] Hydesville, however, aided by research into the matter by reformist Quaker Isaac Post, precipitated an

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[69] See Darnton, p. 14; Tatar, p. 4.

[70] On Mesmer and the spread of his theories in France, see Darnton; Tatar, pp. 6–25; Gauld, pp. 1–16. On mesmerism in the Anglosphere, see Winter, *Mesmerized*; Tatar; Gauld; Crabtree, 'Mesmer and Animal Magnetism'.

[71] Winter, *Mesmerized*, pp. 42–48; Gauld, pp. 197–99.

[72] Tatar, p. 192; Gauld, pp. 179–94.

[73] Godwin, *Theosophical Enlightenment*, p. 188; Moore, pp. 8–9. On Swedenborg's impact on Spiritualism see ibid. pp. 9–12.

American furore regarding the possibility of talking with the dead.[74] Spiritualism soon grew into a global phenomenon; as it did so it expanded its range of observable phenomena. The Hydesville pedlar may have been content with Morse code, but other spirits began to communicate through the voices or automatic writing of mediums, or actually manifested in bodily form. Séance tables were turned or caused to dance, untouched musical instruments produced sound, and the bodies of mediums were levitated. The popularity of Spiritualism waxed and waned throughout the rest of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, with periods of increased loss of life, particularly the American Civil War and World War I, tending to produce fresh interest in communication with the newly departed. Spiritualism also attracted the attention and respect of established scientific authorities. It was successful in doing so because from its origins in Isaac Post's experiments the movement sought to legitimate itself according to the demands of scientific method and discourse.[75]

This serious scientific attention helped give rise to the science of psychical research. Leading scientists, including Michael Faraday, John Tyndall, and Lord Kelvin, dismissed Spiritualism's claim to empirical legitimacy on the grounds that its phenomena violated scientific principles, were based on unrepeatable events, drew from suspicious sources such as Davis and Swedenborg, and reflected occult cosmologies rejected centuries earlier.[76] However, other voices within the scientific community resisted this dismissal. Most famously, a number of leading researchers came together under the auspices of the Society for Psychical Research (SPR), attracted to the potential for radical new discoveries about the workings of the universe.[77] The society was founded in 1882 by a diverse group of British researchers, including physicist William Fletcher Barrett, Reverend Stainton Moses, and Frederic Myers, an important early theorist of the mind and its potential abilities. Theoretical physicist J.J. Thomson was a member, as were Henri Bergson, William James, and British Prime Minister Arthur Balfour. Oliver Lodge, who made key discoveries in radio wave communication, and William Crookes, a pioneer in spectroscopy and vacuum tube technology, served as SPR presidents at the same time as they empirically tested Spiritualist claims and theorised as to their causes, without knowledge of which, Crookes cautioned, 'Mankind must remain sadly ignorant of the mysteries of nature.'[78] Psychical research was not an occult movement, and few of the scientists involved with it were occultists, but there

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[74] On the Fox sisters see Godwin, *Theosophical Enlightenment*, pp. 187–88; Kerr, pp. 4–8.

[75] See Oppenheim, pp. 1, 63, 67–82, 109; Noakes, 'Spiritualism, Science and the Supernatural', pp. 23–25.

[76] On the rejection of Spiritualism by the scientific establishment, see Oppenheim, pp. 327–28; Moore, p. 225; Noakes, 'Spiritualism, Science and the Supernatural', pp. 24–28.

[77] See Oppenheim, pp. 3–4, 123–26, 392–95; Noakes, '"World of the Infinitely Little"', pp. 324–26; Luckhurst, *Invention of Telepathy*, pp. 51–59; Asprem, 'Pondering Imponderables', pp. 144–47.

[78] Crookes, p. 5.

was a permeability of knowledge and method with modern esoteric traditions, particularly Spiritualism, that make organisations like the SPR and individuals like Myers important considerations in assessing the relationship between occultism and science fiction.

Spiritualism also played an instrumental role in the development of the Theosophical Society, another movement that made strong claims to scientific legitimacy. These claims had less impact within the established scientific community, but more influence, in the long run, on occultist and alternative religious movements worldwide. The Society was first founded in New York in 1875 by a group of influential occultists including Colonel Henry Steel Olcott, William Q. Judge, Emma Hardinge Britten, and Blavatsky. The latter claimed to facilitate contact between key followers and a group of enlightened occult masters, or 'Mahatmas', including Serapis and Tuitit Bey, Koot Hoomi, and Morya. Sceptics doubted the existence of such masters and were as likely to attribute their communication, usually in letters delivered astrally or via mail, to Blavatsky's pen as much as to her telepathic abilities and occultist social contacts.[79] Nevertheless, this blend of received wisdom, published by recipients of the Mahatma letters such as Alfred Percy Sinnett, joined with Blavatsky's influential writings, particularly *Isis Unveiled* (1877) and *The Secret Doctrine* (1888), to generate one of the most influential new religious movements of the last two centuries. It would go on to influence the development of the New Age movement, UFO cults, and other alternative religious currents in the twentieth century, including erstwhile Theosophist Rudolf Steiner's Anthroposophy.[80] Like other occultists, Theosophists approached science, as Janet Oppenheim observes, with a 'cavalier license'.[81] Yet, it is clear that thinkers like Blavatsky — who subtitled *The Secret Doctrine*, 'The Synthesis of Science, Religion, and Philosophy' — or Sinnett, who went to great lengths to justify the occult empirical methods behind her teachings,[82] saw Theosophy as both a fulfilment of the goals and methods of science, and their continuation forward toward a more expansive and inclusive study of the universe.

These traditions and concepts helped precipitate what is often called an 'occult revival' in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By 1917 Scarborough felt that there was 'now more interest in the occult, more literature produced dealing with psychal powers than ever before in our history.'[83] George Bernard Shaw felt that the half-century prior to WWI had been uniquely 'addicted to table-rapping, materialization séances, clairvoyance, palmistry, crystal-

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[79] On the Mahatmas, their letters, and issues surrounding their authorship and content, see Goodrick-Clarke, 'The Coming of the Masters', pp. 115–42; Hammer, pp. 380–86; Godwin, 'Blavatsky and the First Generation of Theosophy', pp. 19–20, 25.

[80] See Hammer, esp. pp. 59–84.

[81] Oppenheim, p. 199.

[82] See pp. 141–42.

[83] Scarborough, pp. 4–5.

gazing and the like'.[84] As Shaw's recollection indicates, the occult revival had more dimensions than can simply be contained within the three movements I have described. The period also saw a renewal in alchemy, particularly a form of spiritual alchemy focused on inner self-transmutation,[85] and divination via the Tarot and astrology. Rosicrucianism and Freemasonry began a long process of emerging from secretive, esoteric cells to become more exoterically accessible. The most famous example is the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, founded in London in 1888 by three Freemasons, which synthesised Rosicrucianism, ritual magic, alchemy, kabbalah, Egyptology, astral travel, Christianity, and astrology (among others) to innovate an approach to magic and initiation that has been imitated by many different groups, including Thelema and, to a lesser degree, Scientology.[86]

As the Golden Dawn's syncretic appeal to a variety of earlier forms of knowledge and practice indicates, occultism did not simply arrive *sui generis* in the nineteenth century. The magicians and mediums of the period were inheritors of a variety of religious, philosophical, and cultural strands, including Neoplatonism, Gnosticism, Renaissance Hermeticism, alchemy, kabbalah, astrology, and numerous magical and folk traditions. These currents had a number of characteristics in common, including a belief in a sympathetic correspondence between material and divine realms, a valuation of secrecy, and a pantheistic sense of the divine immanent in nature,[87] but, as Wouter J. Hanegraaff has shown, they came to be further conflated as they were rejected by Christians who thought them dangerous and demonic, and post-Enlightenment rationalists and empiricists who saw them as irrational and superstitious.[88] By the eighteenth century, this diverse group of traditions had become joined in a 'reservoir of what modernity rejects',[89] a shared identity that they continue to possess today, usually grouped as 'esoteric' or 'Western esoteric' traditions.[90]

Working within this *longue durée* esoteric context, nineteenth-century occultists adopted the priorities of earlier currents, including a belief in an ancient, perennial current of wisdom, a valuation of magical theory and practice, a quest for mystical or gnostic illumination, communication with elemental, angelic, and human spirits, and divination. Just as SF must be understood as subject to temporal permutations, however, occultism in this period must be seen

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[84] Shaw, V, 20.

[85] See Principe and Newman, pp. 388–95.

[86] On the history, theory, and practices of the Golden Dawn, see Howe; Gilbert.

[87] Faivre, pp. 10–15.

[88] See Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*.

[89] Hanegraaff, 'The Trouble with Images', p. 110.

[90] I will largely avoid the latter term. As I have argued elsewhere, it contains problematic categories of identity embedded in the category of 'the West'. It has, moreover, always proven difficult to limit esotericism and occultism to the European or Christian influences the term seems to suggest. See Roukema and Kilner-Johnson.

as a historically unique aspect of esotericism. It was never a cohesive movement — indeed, some members of the traditions I am grouping under the banner of occultism bitterly opposed each other — but occultists of the period can be distinguished from their forebears by the way in which they adapted their mystical and magical concepts and practices to the epistemological and social priorities of the age.[91] In the wake of colonial contact with religions around the globe, occultists incorporated non-Christian (particularly Hindu and Buddhist) ideas, reflective of a tendency to syncretise diverse traditions in the hope of uncovering a single, universal tradition.[92] Occultism also offered more opportunities for women, sometimes based in a belief that they were more likely to be gifted with the powers of mediumship.[93] This social inclusion was paralleled by a cultural and intellectual expansion in which occultists used both fiction and non-fiction to share esoteric wisdom with an ever more literate public.

Arguably the most impactful shift, however, and certainly the most relevant for the development of science fiction, was the nineteenth-century occultist desire to scientifically legitimate spiritual and supernatural phenomena. As the insistence of enframing has increased, so too has the epistemic demand that any theory or concept, even those — perhaps *especially* those — seen as spiritual, supernatural, or paranormal, be naturalistically viable, empirically explainable, or traceable to some materialist cause. While some magical theorists and practitioners have unapologetically maintained exclusively supernatural or spiritual perspectives, almost every esoteric tradition since the mid to late nineteenth century has seen some degree of adaptation to the epistemic demands of scientism. Occultists were generally hostile to materialism, but otherwise they embraced scientific legitimation in a variety of forms and with a number of different strategies.[94] Some of these strategies were largely discursive; describing otherwise unsubstantiated theories or discoveries with the timbre or neology of scientific reportage could do much to convince audiences of their legitimacy. Discoveries and technologies which retained something of the mysterious or hypothetical about them, such as electricity, magnetism, and the ether hypothesis (soon to be debunked), were particularly useful for phrasing naturalistic explanations for telepathy, the soul, and astral or spirit realms.

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[91] On the boundaries and characteristics of what is often called ‘modern’ occultism see Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, pp. 421–22; Hammer, p. 7; Pasi, pp. 1364–68; Galbreath, pp. 15–32; Gilbert, pp. 20–23; Faivre, pp. 86–90; Asprem, *Arguing with Angels*, pp. 45–77; Granholm, *Dark Enlightenment*, pp. 43–46.

[92] See Asprem, 'Kabbalah Recreata', pp. 135–36.

[93] See Owen, *Darkened Room*, pp. 7–16.

[94] On the complex interrelations between science and occultism in the period, see Wilson, esp. pp. 5–10; McCorristine, 'General Introduction', pp. ix–xv; Hammer, pp. 202–05; Oppenheim, pp. 199–391; Noakes, ‘”World of the Infinitely Little”’; Noakes, ‘Spiritualism, Science and the Supernatural’; Stockhammer, p. 134.

Other strategies were more methodological: occultists (and indeed some scientists as well) valorised the spirit of empirical method, but either argued for an expansion of its research focus or profiled it as a valuable first stage of research before moving to the acquisition of knowledge via psychic powers or gnostic experience. In this sense, occultism could market itself as an epistemological solution for questions that empirical science just could not answer. Similarly, in areas where conventional scientific research methods faced more challenges — the sciences of the mind, astronomy, particle physics — occultists were able to propose hypotheses that were greeted as legitimate theories by some members of the scientific community. Particularly in mental science, their experimental approaches to trance and other experiences and states of mind played important roles in developing scientific knowledge.[95] Occultists also argued for an expanded application of natural law and empirical research to areas of existence often deemed supernatural. This appeal reflected the rising epistemological influence of an approach to science which leading Victorian scientist Thomas Henry Huxley called 'scientific naturalism'.[96] This methodology, which inevitably framed epistemology, did not outright reject the possibility of supernatural beings and realms, but refused to admit causes originating from these entities as explanations for the function of the natural world. In response, occultists and psychical researchers presented a persuasive argument that the supernatural might better be described, in Frederic Myers's terms, as 'supernormal' — a set of faculties and phenomena which went 'beyond the level of ordinary experience' but which would soon be established as perfectly naturalistic realities by more advanced methods of discovery.[97] Occult science was rarely as empirically grounded and compatible with existing laws as most scientists required, particularly those of a strong materialist bent. However, these alternative approaches to scientific epistemology and method were shared by a number of important scientific figures of the period, including Lodge, Crookes, Barrett, and evolutionary biologist Alfred Russel Wallace, who believed that scientific methods could, and should, be applied to test the reality of occult forces, experiences, and realms. These figures amplified the claims of various occult scientific methods and theories, giving them a degree of epistemological respectability no longer recognisable in later periods.

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[95] See Owen, *Place of Enchantment*, p. 6; Main, p. 740.

[96] On the history and etymology of 'scientific naturalism', see Dawson and Lightman, 'Introduction to *Victorian Scientific Naturalism*', pp. 1–10; Luckhurst, *Invention of Telepathy*, pp. 14–16; Asprem, *Problem of Disenchantment*, pp. 68–73.

[97] Myers, I, xxii.

Occultism and science fiction: areas of intersection

Occultism thus adapted antique, medieval, and early modern esoteric knowledge in a manner sensitive to the epistemic requirements of enframing. In doing so, it created approaches to knowledge that enhanced hypothesis, relied on discourse more than evidence, brought the supernatural down into the natural, and challenged the conventions of empirical science. In this liminally scientific form it frequently drew the attention of early science fiction writers. Authors including Poe, Bulwer-Lytton, Corelli, and Bellamy emulated the methods of occult science in order to develop rhetorical approaches to fiction that reframed the magical and supernatural with empiricist verisimilitude, a stylistic strategy that would go on to define the cognitive effect of the SF mode. They also adopted theories promulgated by occult science and psychical research, from telepathy to astral travel, adapting them into their fiction with such frequency and popular appeal that they would evolve into long-lasting SF tropes. Both the symbols and rhetorics thus established within SF would, in turn, reciprocally influence occultist theories and imagery.

This engagement was set in the context of wider developments in the process of scientific knowledge acquisition, communication, and stabilisation. Occultism and SF proved popular in a knowledge environment in which scientific research underwent a sustained process of professionalisation and institutionalisation.[98] This shift was accompanied by a similar movement away from the closely entangled 'one culture' relationship of science and literature at mid-century. Though leading scientists like Huxley and John Tyndall continued to publish books and periodical pieces with the intent of educating the public and advocating scientific methods and worldviews, a divide widened between professional scientists supported by established research networks and institutions, and amateur, hobbyist scientists. The latter were passionate about the opportunities for knowledge offered by scientific method, but were growingly left to debate and discover through 'popular' channels from periodicals to fiction.[99] Helped by rapid growth in public literacy and education, periodicals and romances alike took advantage of the cultural and intellectual retreat of scientific debate into elite spheres. Occultists and SF writers also took advantage of this absence, joining amateur scientists in entertaining, persuading, and challenging the scientific enthusiast with radical hypotheses and unconventional knowledge claims.

SF and occultism responded to these literary and scientific developments in similar ways, and for similar purposes, meeting in a number of distinct epistemological and methodological

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[98] Willis, p. 8.

[99] On scientific specialisation and literariness, see Willis, pp. 7–8; White, pp. 85–87; Dawson and Lightman, 'Introduction to *Victorian Science and Literature*', pp. xiv–xv; Luckhurst, *Science Fiction*, pp. 16–17.

areas of intersection, set on a collision course because of a number of shared intellectual and creative motivations. Many of these engagements emerge from attempts to ameliorate the uneasy, sometimes epistemically violent relationship between science and religion in the period. Surprisingly, though this tension is widely recognised as, in Janet Oppeheim's terms, 'that most agonizing of Victorian problems',[100] historians of neither science fiction nor esotericism have devoted much time to the period's many attempts to harmonise science and religion in fiction, generating the tropes and stylistics that would later be recognised as science fictional as they did so. Authors like Verne may have avoided the metaphysical, but it was central to the concerns of most of the period's SF writers, from Shelley's enlivening of Frankenstein's creature via a combination of Hermetic alchemy and electrical technology, to Poe's attempts 'to reconcile a scientific outlook with a sentimental religious mysticism',[101] to the late-century scientific romances of Charles Hinton and the Reverend Dr Edwin Abbott's *Flatland* (1884) — texts, as Paul Fayter has argued, which are 'hybrids combining mathematics, religious speculation, fictional narrative, and scientific reflections'.[102] Occultism was front and centre in many such texts, precisely because of the way in which it sought to update supernatural and spiritual concepts to respond to the demands of enframing. In doing so, it degaussed the metaphysical with scientific discourse and method, corralling the fantastic within an empiricist framework and thus generating science fiction.

Within this wider context, this dissertation illustrates the collisions and elisions of occultism and science fiction as they met in a number of specific areas of intersection, either unconsciously and incidentally, or, as with authors like Bulwer-Lytton, Corelli, and Wells, very purposefully and cannily. My exploration of the crossing leylines of SF and occultism will proceed via case studies of the texts and impact of three authors who generated an SF mode from occultist materials. Chapter Two assesses the science fiction of Bulwer-Lytton, a leading mid-nineteenth-century author, politician, and occultist. Bulwer was interested in the widest possible spectrum of scientific research, but I evaluate his conscious construction of an SF mode from fictional representations of medical, psychological, and magical applications of mesmerism. I argue that Bulwer's SF scientises the occult by evolving a theory of telepathy decades before the SPR 'introduced' a similar hypothesis. Bulwer's science fiction provides a launchpad for discussion of two specific areas of intersection between occultism and SF: the adaption of ancient concepts into a modern technoscientific framework, and an epistemological reliance on hypothetical knowledge over established fact.

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[100] Oppenheim, p. 59.
[101] Evans, 'Nineteenth-Century SF', p. 16.
[102] Fayter, p. 266.

Chapters Three and Four are structured similarly. The former explores the intriguing limit case of Spiritualist advocate and medium Emma Hardinge Britten and her novel *Ghost Land; or, Researches into the Mysteries of Occultism* (1876), written as Britten participated in founding the Theosophical Society. The novel fictionalises her spiritual science of 'Spiritism', unconsciously generating science fiction from an earnest desire to naturalistically legitimate phenomena from clairvoyance to the spirit world. *Ghost Land* provides the basis for discussion of three further areas of intersection: a reliance on scientific discourse over scientific fact, the naturalisation of the supernatural, and a shared fascination with the future.

My last case study analyses the science fiction of Marie Corelli. Her links to occultism are more tenuous than those of Bulwer or Britten, but Chapter Four argues that she generated SF as she passionately illustrated and defended an occult-informed 'psychic creed' within her fiction and its paratextual margins. Part of Corelli's method for establishing the verisimilitude of this creed was an unsubstantiated claim to personal occult experience. This chapter thus explores two social and methodological — rather than abstract and epistemological — areas of intersection: a claim to subjective experience as empirical data, and a reproduction of the professional scientist's claim to authority.

In the final chapter I expand my cultural-historical lens to assess the wider engagement between occultism and science fiction. The chapter begins by exploring four further areas of intersection: shared gothic origins; a heterotopian mediation of various post-Enlightenment binaries; an urge to re-enchant, or 'reanimate' worldviews perceived to have been made sterile by the currents of enframing; and a strong current of seriousness beneath fictional play. It then surveys the manner in which occultism could be shaped by the SF mode, while, conversely, taking a wider view on how three key occultist currents — mesmerism, Spiritualism, and Theosophy — helped generate SF in the period. The chapter then reviews several of the main tropes which were formed, or at least shaped, by science fiction's encounter with esotericism in the period: psychical powers like telepathy, alternate realms and extra-planetary spaces, and the extra-terrestrial. I argue that these tropes emerged from two further areas of intersection: the protoplasmic state of mental science and a fascination with otherness.

By returning to the period in which both SF and occultism formed some of their defining characteristics, I intend to illustrate the important role that occultism has played in defining the tropes and stylistics of the mega-text, as well as the extent to which the SF mode has informed the manner in which occultists continue to express their ideas and encounter supernormal experiences. I do not, however, intend this project as an argument for a particular periodisation of either tradition. Science fiction seems to me to have many significant and influential precursors prior to the mid-nineteenth century. Occultism has an even longer pedigree; despite the many adaptations of the occult revival, there was as much continuity as change. Yet, a

confluence of social, cultural, and intellectual factors does appear to have contributed to particularly rapid growth and increases in popularity for both SF and occultism in the last half of the nineteenth century, with repercussions that continue to echo in the present day. The shifting social function and position of science, increases in literacy and education, and tensions between science and religion, seem to have created ideal cultural conditions for the emergence of two movements which sought to scientise religion and sacralise science, while freely exploring the widest possible gamut of scientific hypotheses, imagining enchanted new technologies, species, and spaces as they did so. Occultism, particularly in the form of mesmerism and Spiritualism, experienced a boom in popularity from mid-century, but the scope of public interest seems still to have been expanding around the time that the number of SF texts began to increase in the 1870s. The decade saw the founding of the Theosophical Society, accompanied by influential publications including Britten's *Ghost Land* and *Art Magic* (1876), Blavatsky's *Isis Unveiled*, and Hargrave Jenning's *The Rosicrucians* (1879). The seeds were laid for Theosophy's surge in popularity, the founding of the SPR (1882), and the establishment of the Golden Dawn (1888) in the 1880s, followed by even greater popularity in the decade following. Science fiction, as Edward James has shown, experienced a similar development curve.[103]

I have structured the timeframe of this project around this shared rise in cultural significance. I could have started earlier in the century, with similar engagements in French science fiction or with Poe's generation of an SF mode from his interest in mesmerism,[104] and indeed I will touch upon these important loci as well, but most of my analysis is focused on the period between 1859, when Bulwer began consciously writing occult science into fiction in order to create a form of verisimilitude palatable to the tastes of an enframed readership, to Gernsback's founding of *Amazing Stories* in 1926. While I do not find much value in the idea of a 'Gernsback moment' that precipitated a radical change in SF's nature, 1926 functions as a synechdochal marker for a gradual shift in which occult stylistics, concepts, and epistemologies began to be more broadly occluded by SF authors, even as they remained vital to the genre's tropes and to the way the SF mode reveals itself. Correspondingly, the scientific validity of mesmerism, Spiritualism, and Theosophy had all but evaporated by this point in time, though the claims of mediums and psychics remained the operative terrain of parapsychology. I will refer to the science fiction of this period between Bulwer and Gernsback as 'early' SF, though there are certainly many prior manifestations of the mode as well.

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[103] Using an inclusive approach that accounts for lost race tales, utopian fiction, and the dime novel 'boy inventor' stories popular in America, James has identified 101 SF texts published in the 1870s, 256 in the 1880s, and 576 in the 1890s ('Science Fiction by Gaslight', p. 37).

[104] See Lind.

This temporal window allows a wide timeframe in which to trace patterns of cultural evolution and interrelationship, but it does pose a challenge to comprehensiveness. I have encountered hundreds of fictional texts in the English language alone that to some extent deploy or generate an SF mode from occultism. I have not been able to consider nearly all of these in my analysis. The same is true for books and articles written by occultists, which frequently reflect a science fictional influence by directly referencing particular texts, by mimicking a science fictional style, or by adapting certain tropes. Partly because of this overwhelmingly large body of evidence, I have limited my analysis to the Anglo-American sphere, the cultural output of Britain and several former and current colonies — America, Canada, Australia, New Zealand — to which it maintained close ties. Another, better reason for focusing on the Anglo-American context is that novels, stories, and films produced therein have had, on balance, more influence on the global development of science fiction than those of any other cultural sphere. The same is true of occultism. Spiritualism arose in America before spreading over the globe. The Theosophical Society was also founded there and, though re-founded and headquartered in India, most of its leading individuals and most influential texts in this period were Anglo-American. A strong competitor here, however, is the Franco-sphere. It was there that mesmerism arose and prospered, and there that influential French magus Eliphas Lévi played a major role in the development of occultism with his synthesis of kabbalah, magic, and the Tarot. Perhaps even more importantly, French science fiction established itself earlier, and its authors were just as, if not more prolific than their Anglo-American contemporaries. Including this French context would have made for a more complete consideration of the relationship between early SF and occultism, but the scope of such a project would have been too great. I have, however, included discussion of key French actors, particularly those without whom the Anglo-American context cannot be understood, including Lévi, Flammarion, and several important mesmerist theorists.

There is thus plenty of room, both inside and outside my frame of reference, for further research by those who also see value in excavating forgotten or marginalised texts for cultural, intellectual, and social artefacts. Indeed, there is much value to be had in such archaeology. As Franklin Rosemont observes, this sort of research counters what E.P. Thompson called ‘the enormous condescension of posterity’. Such reconstitution can be difficult, but the rewards are significant:

> Recovering lost, ignored and — let’s face it — suppressed witnesses of the past does a lot to remoralize the demoralized here and now. And when these rescue missions help topple the dominant models of the past, they

> make it easier for those who are trying to make the present more liveable. For sheer intellectual excitement, that's hard to beat.[105]

In restoring voices that have helped shape a particular narrative, movement, or genre we can thus motivate those attempting to similarly impact the course of history or shape narratives in our own time. Projects like this one can never hope to catch up with their subjects and properly recreate their purposes, flavours, and messages, but it can still be enormously productive to interrogate past attempts at constructing genre or shaping ideology. Analysing the various ways in which SF has been shaped as mode and genre, or in which occultism has emerged as a constellation of concepts, practices, and ways of knowing, can reveal the intellectual, social, and psychological priorities that have led cultures or individuals to form such genres or movements in the first place, in response to, or as mirrors of, particular discourses, debates, and events.

Deconstruction of the manner in which science fiction was produced in the nineteenth century, and of the varying ways in which these texts have been received since, can add to our understanding of a number of important socio-intellectual currents in the period. In addition to more comprehensive pictures of early SF and revival-era occultism, this genre-based analysis marks out new ground in the study of religion in the period, particularly in terms of its relation to science. For example, Chapter Four outlines a set of occult, experiential forms of empirical research which proved particularly attractive for authors of SF. This project also offers further, necessary complexity to the idea of modern, technoscientific cultures as secular or disenchanted. My findings contribute to research which has shown the significant, continuing productivity of magical thinking in supposedly secular cultures, indicating, as Christopher Partridge has argued, that secularism entails a shift toward religious change and diversification rather than a non-religious cultural environment. Science fiction and occultism have frequently participated, often together, in a 'confluence of secularization and sacralization'.[106] While the merging of SF and occultism to provide sacralisation amenable to the currents of enframing has received the attention of scholars of twentieth- and twenty-first century esotericism,[107] a similar amelioration in the nineteenth-century has gone largely unexplored, mostly as a result, I think, of spillover from the boundary work that has gone on within the community of science fiction authors, readers, and critics.

Indeed, this study addresses a general paucity of research in this area. We have seen that SF scholars have, for several conjoined reasons, shown little interest in the occult-infused SF of the period. Even for later science fiction, historians and critics have most often focused on texts

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[105] Foreword to Deveney, *Paschal Beverly Randolph*, p. xiii.
[106] Partridge, p. 4. Cf. Kripal, *Authors of the Impossible*, p. 28.
[107] See, e.g., Clark, pp. 96–97; Partridge, pp. 139–44; Kripal, *Mutants and Mystics*; Cusack, pp. 53–112.

which critique,[108] or, less often, positively represent,[109] normative Western religions, particularly Christianity. Researchers have noted a more harmonious relationship between SF and religion in general in the last few decades,[110] a shift which has begun to produce more research into science fictional representations of religions like Buddhism, and, as we have seen, twentieth-century esoteric movements; this dissertation seeks to illustrate the equally fertile function of religious phenomena in earlier SF.

Historians of nineteenth-century literature and culture have shown much more interest in occultism than SF critics, but in this area we find a contrasting lack of attention paid to science fiction. Studies of SF by Victorianists are rare,[111] and the innumerable handbooks of nineteenth-century fiction tend to limit themselves to brief nods in the direction of 'scientific romance', avoiding mention of occultism and largely relying on skeletal reproductions of SF histories weighted strongly in the direction of Wells and the Vernians.[112] This lack of interest is attributable to some of the definitional problems I have discussed, but for another likely explanation we need look no further than Charlotte Sleigh's preface to *Literature and Science* (2010), which explains the exclusion of science fiction from a book about science and fiction. Sleigh confesses that she is 'ignorant' of SF and admits 'a frankly cowardly reason for not correcting my ignorance: science fiction is, rightly or wrongly, not taken seriously as a genre of literature with a capital "L", and I hope this book might be taken seriously'.[113] In addition to their evident cultural elitism, such approaches overlook innumerable sources and voices which can help us better understand nineteenth-century popular culture and alternative religion.

The same is true for the history of science. Early science fiction can be mined for all sorts of indicative positions and arguments. In addition to various occult sciences, a reader need not wade far into a novel of the period before they find themselves tripping over theories drawn from the mental sciences, physics, psychical research, geology, and astronomy. As Jessica Riskin observes, actual research into the individuals, discoveries, theories, and social contexts of science leads 'anywhere knowledge is made, used, arranged, taught, displayed, debated, censored, communicated, made secret, exposed, or simply claimed, thus providing windows into virtually

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[108] E.g. Clark, pp. 107–09; Frisch and Martos, pp. 12–13; Mendlesohn, 'Religion and Science Fiction', p. 266; Woodman, pp. 111–18.

[109] E.g. McGrath, p. 3; Hrotic; Woodman, p. 117; Mendlesohn, 'Religion and Science Fiction', p. 271; Gregory, *Science Fiction Theology*.

[110] See, e.g., McGrath, p. 3; Possamai and Lee, pp. 206–13; Seed, *Science Fiction*, p. 3.

[111] But see Brantlinger, 'Victorian Science Fiction'; Luckhurst, *Science Fiction*; Willis.

[112] See, e.g., Pykett, pp. 192–211; James, *The Victorian Novel*, esp. pp. 214–15; Warwick and Willis, esp. p. 82.

[113] Sleigh, p. xi.

every social and cultural phenomenon'.[114] Just as we cannot understand science fiction or occultism without historically contextualising them in relation to the scientific thought and method of the day, so we cannot understand science without taking account of its esoteric and fictional manifestations.

The dissection and reconstitution of past generic acts can very productively interrogate the intellectual and cultural binaries that have formed perceptions of the SF mode: religion, it is found, informs science as often as it competes with it; the supernatural is a fey place of dream and enchantment, but can also provide a location for naturalistic conceptions of spiritual phenomena and experiences; imagination clashes with the ordering of enframing, but in both science fiction and occultism it also embraces it, decorates it, elevates and worships it, while simultaneously stripping bare its pretensions. The fact that many SF fans, writers, critics, and authors have relied upon such dichotomies to form their perceptions of the genre cannot be ignored. Conversely, however, we should not overlook the continuing, fertile relationship between science fictional and occultist methods of understanding, describing, and encountering the world. From the earliest conceptions of a fusion of science and fiction, magic and religion have nested comfortably in the SF mode — sometimes heavily disguised, like *Star Trek* replicators transmuting base matter into exotic alien cocktails — at other times more transparent, as with the astral travel, telepathy, spirit aliens, and mediumship that populate early science fiction.

[114] Riskin, p. 2.

Chapter Two

'The Brains of Our Time': Edward Bulwer-Lytton and Telepathy

When literary historians look to the best-selling fiction of Edward Bulwer-Lytton[1] (1803–1873) they find Rosicrucians, spirit rappings, alchemy, magic, and mesmerism, and turn quickly to generic histories deemed compatible with such traditions: the gothic, fantasy, and the weird. In their time, however, Bulwer's occult interests align more closely with a complex network of scientific concepts, debates, and methods than presentist analysis might suggest. Bulwer explored esoteric phenomena in his fiction alongside more empirically established theories without differentiating between the two, motivated by a conviction that occultism guarded truths about the natural world — some of them known for thousands of years — that would soon be discovered by modern science. This chapter analyses the specific example of Bulwer's investigation of mesmerism, which he explored in intellectual debate, purportedly empirical experimentation, and the laboratory of fiction. From this occult scientific analysis, he developed a theory of telepathy thirty years before the term was coined and defined by the SPR.[2]

In what follows, I will argue that Bulwer consciously generated an SF mode in the process of seriously exploring a wide range of scientific explanations for occult experience in his fiction. This is, to my knowledge, the first in-depth analysis of his enormously influential contribution to SF. Of his works, only *The Coming Race* is generally acknowledged as mega-textually significant. I will show how two others, *The Haunted and the Haunters* (1859) and *A Strange Story* (1861–1862), generate an SF mode out of their attempts to scientifically explain occult phenomena. My discussion of Bulwer's formulation of a theory of telepathy, in dialogue with similar concepts proposed in the period, re-evaluates the current historiography of telepathy, which views the concept as the seminal innovation of Frederic Myers and the SPR.[3] In thus adding to research into nineteenth-century sciences of the mind, often called 'mental physiology' in the period, I will also

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[1] Bulwer-Lytton used a variety of name combinations over the course of his life, including Bulwer, Lytton, Lytton Bulwer, Bulwer Lytton, and Lord Lytton. I will largely refer to him as Bulwer for the sake of simplicity. On Bulwer's naming history see Campbell, p. 1. Campbell's 1986 book is a good biographical source, as is Mitchell's 2003 work. These sources draw extensively from the comprehensive *Life of Edward Bulwer, First Lord Lytton* by Edward's grandson, Victor (hereafter '*Life*'), who drew from Edward's papers and an unfinished manuscript by Edward's son, Robert.

[2] Terms for telepathy prior to Frederic Myers's 1882 coining of the term included 'mind-reading', 'mental traveling', and 'thought-transference' (coined in 1891 by Oliver Lodge). Similar to my use of 'science fiction' to describe texts prior to Gernsback, I will use 'telepathy' to describe phenomena prior to 1882, first because it is the term commonly used since, and second because this usage reflects my argument that the SPR deployed a concept already in existence for decades prior.

[3] See Luckhurst, *Invention of Telepathy*; Enns, p. 507; Kripal, *Mutants and Mystics*, p. 189.

add to our understanding of Bulwer's mesmerism. This has been researched at length by several scholars,[4] but Bulwer's transition from fluidic mesmerism to a theory of telepathy predicated on imagination has yet to be observed.

In general, this chapter seeks to address a paucity of scholarly attention to a figure whose dynamic, generically innovative fiction sold widely in his own time, the size of his readership rivalled only by Charles Dickens.[5] Yet, Bulwer's reputation and popularity have dramatically failed to live up to Mary Shelley's 1831 prophecy that he would become 'the first author of the age'.[6] He is now a minor nineteenth-century literary figure whose current reputation is perhaps best indicated by the motto of an online fiction-writing competition founded in his name: 'where "WWW" means "Wretched Writers Welcome"'.[7] Explanations for this astonishing decline in popularity can only be conjectural, though much of it seems to be due to a declining taste for Bulwer's expressive, sensational style.[8] Whatever the reasons, in not placing him among peers like Dickens, Eliot, and Thackeray, historians of Victorian culture and ideas have committed an error of omission. Regardless of personal opinions regarding taste and style, any scholar wishing to understand nineteenth-century literary culture in Britain, North America, the Antipodes, or the variety of other cultures into which his work was translated, must give Bulwer the centrality afforded to him in his own time. In doing so, as Leslie Mitchell has argued, we can get a better picture of 'the hopes and anxieties of an age'.[9] Bulwer's enfolding of a range of scientific, political, social, and religious subjects into fiction is particularly rewarding to the cultural researcher. As this chapter will show, there is hardly a clearer window through which we can look to gain a cultural historical view of nineteenth-century entanglements between religion and science, ancient and modern, natural and supernatural.

Bulwer's centrality is reinforced by his extra-textual influence. He was an active member of Parliament, sitting for the Whigs throughout the 1830s and later switching to the Tory government of his friend Benjamin Disraeli.[10] Outside of politics, his literary success was augmented by social position. Born into landed gentry, he was made a baronet in 1838, and in 1866, upon entering the House of Lords, Sir Edward became Baron Lytton of Knebworth, the estate of his mother's family, the Lyttons.

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[4] See esp. Budge, pp. 39–60; Van Schlun, pp. 140–76; Wolff, pp. 235–43.

[5] Brown, 'Bulwer's Reputation', p. 29.

[6] Mary Shelley, journal entry, 11 January 1831, qtd. In Aldiss and Wingrove, p. 91.

[7] See 'Bulwer-Lytton Fiction Contest' <http://www.bulwer-lytton.com> [accessed 18 March 2018].

[8] On Bulwer's reputation, see Brown, 'Bulwer's Reputation'; Mitchell, pp. 87–91; Huckvale, pp. 8–9.

[9] Mitchell, p. xxi. Cf. Brown, 'Bulwer's Reputation', p. 35.

[10] On Bulwer's politics and Parliamentary career, see Ritchie, pp. 4–6; Campbell, pp. 11–20, 64–65; Wolff, p. 148.

It was as a writer, however, that he had the most impact. His novels were social influences in themselves. Bulwer's *Pelham* changed 1828 fashion trends in men's evening clothes;[11] serialised chapters of his unfinished *Asmodeus at Large* joined in public debate over the 1832 Reform Bill even as Bulwer argued the bill's merits in Parliament; the inventors of 'Bovril', a popular beef stock, drew on the electrical vitality of Vril, an occult force imagined in *The Coming Race.* Through his fiction Bulwer impacted a variety of nineteenth-century luminaries. Matthew Arnold, Goethe, Thomas Carlyle, John Stuart Mill, Harriet Martineau, and Baron Macaulay declared admiration for his work;[12] Dickens's *Great Expectations* (1860–1861), Richard Wagner's *Rienzi* (1842), Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1893), and the general taste and narrative style of Disraeli, Sheridan Le Fanu, H. Rider Haggard, H.P. Lovecraft, Dennis Wheatley, Sax Rohmer, Arthur Machen and, perhaps most of all, Edgar Allen Poe, would not exist, or would be markedly different had Bulwer's copious output not helped to define the nineteenth-century and its generic categories.[13] With the exception of Disraeli, this latter list of authors indicates the area where Bulwer's influence has been most remarkable and most long-lasting; his combination of hifalutin romance, medievalism, magic, and the gothic macabre seems to have made a major and long-lasting impression on the development of genre fantasy. His influence on Machen, Lovecraft, and Wheatley shows him to be an important figure in the history of 'weird' fiction, a term popularized by Lovecraft but used in a similar way by Bulwer in *Asmodeus at Large* (p. 138). Later weird tales reproduce the approach taken to the supernatural in Bulwer's occult fiction, naturalising it and bringing it close to hand, while still maintaining a sense of the gothic uncanny. This same combination of natural and supernatural feeds the engines of another genre in which Lytton proved seminal. I speak, of course, of science fiction.

Hidden in plain sight: Bulwer's occult science fiction

Before illustrating Bulwer's development of a fiction-based theory of telepathy from his serious interest in magic and mesmerism, it is worthwhile to examine the broader context of his conscious creation of what would later be known as science fiction. He generated this SF mode largely in the course of fictionalising occultist concepts and practices which he encountered through personal esoteric experience and experimentation. His interest in occultism flowed from an open epistemological stance that encouraged empirical research into a wide range of

[11] Christensen, p. 222.

[12] Escott, p. 333; Christensen, pp. x–xi.

[13] On Bulwer's general influence see Campbell, pp. 78, 130–33, 234; Christensen, pp. 222–34. For his influence on Stoker, see Seed, Introduction to *The Coming Race*, p. xxxvi; on Wagner, see Huckvale, p. 3. On Poe, see Pollin.

phenomena. Following the mantra that 'it is greater to live for knowledge than to live by it',[14] his curiosity drove him to explore a number of marginal sciences and occult practices. In addition to a decades-long interest in mesmerism, he was interested in phrenology,[15] practiced geomancy for the benefit of fellow Parliamentarians,[16] claimed a clairvoyant ability to see the future,[17] became briefly 'addicted to astrology' in his earlier years,[18] found divination unreliable but 'astonishing' at times,[19] and investigated Spiritualism by taking part in dozens of séances, including a series of private sessions with famous medium D.D. Home,[20] all explorations that may have been connected, from Bulwer's perspective anyway, to his 1861 report to his son that he had been thinking of taking up 'some branch of science seriously'.[21] Bulwer owned a rare original copy of Mary Anne Atwood's *A Suggestive Inquiry into the Hermetic Mystery* (1850), a treatise which proposed a synthesis of ether physics, Christian mysticism, and alchemy and was influential in esoteric circles.[22] He was a frequent attendee at Lady Blessington's salon in Kensington, where in addition to Disraeli and Dickens, Lytton rubbed shoulders with the occultist John Varley, an expert in astrology and crystal-gazing and, as the older man of the two, a conduit through whom Lytton could access the esoteric knowledge of a previous generation of English occultists.[23] Golden Dawn adept Moina Mathers reported that Lytton was a 'great friend' of Kenneth Mackenzie, a leading figure in mid- to late-nineteenth-century English occultism,[24] though this claim must be questioned somewhat because of its source — as a result of Lytton's fame and social status, later occultists were fond of overextending his position in occultist networks.

The weight of evidence would seem to show that Bulwer was an active and well-connected occultist. Yet, though he seems to have claimed psychic powers and exhibited them to friends and colleagues, he was not public with his interests. His fiction is strewn with esoteric references, but

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[14] *Life*, I, 31n1. On occult aspects of Bulwer's life and thought see Wolff, pp. 244–59; Godwin, *Theosophical Enlightenment*, pp. 192–95; Franklin, 'The Evolution of Occult Spirituality in Victorian England', pp. 124–25.

[15] Mitchell, p. 147.

[16] Bell, p. 56.

[17] Author Augustus Hare relates a third-hand account of overhearing Bulwer 'talking of second-sight, and of his own power of seeing the future of those he was with' (VI, 142–43).

[18] Edward Bulwer-Lytton to Rosina Bulwer-Lytton, 1826, Knebworth MSS, P5, box 88, qtd. in Mitchell, p. 144.

[19] Mitchell, p. 147.

[20] See Wolff, pp. 254–59. On Bulwer's exploration of Spiritualism see Godwin, *Theosophical Enlightenment*, pp. 192–95; Noakes, 'Spiritualism, Science and the Supernatural', p. 23.

[21] Edward Bulwer-Lytton to Robert Bulwer-Lytton, 11 December 1861, Knebworth MSS, J2 I 225, qtd. in Mitchell, p. 141.

[22] McIntosh, *Rosy Cross Unveiled*, pp. 21–22.

[23] See Godwin, *Theosophical Enlightenment*, pp. 178–80; Matoff, *Marguerite, Countess of Blessington*, pp. 210–11.

[24] Howe, p. 39.

aside from a relatively late essay, 'On the Normal Clairvoyance of the Imagination',[25] there is little mention of occultism in his nonfiction. His grandson Victor examined this question as he prepared an extensive biography, but was ultimately unsure about the depth of Bulwer's engagement with supernatural beliefs and occult practices:

> I have ample proof that his study of occult subjects was serious and discriminating; and that traces of this bent of his mind should be apparent in his books is natural enough. […] On the other hand, I have found amongst his papers a sufficient number of references to psychical phenomena to satisfy me that he was under no illusions regarding them. Spirit rappings, clairvoyance, astrology, etc. —he investigated them all, and found them all disappointingly unconvincing and unprofitable.[26]

Victor's impressions can only add to the evidence rather than give any certainty as to the extent of Bulwer's occult engagement. As we will see, Lytton certainly rejected Spiritualist attributions of phenomena like spirit rappings and mediumship to the actions of human spirits, but he did not discredit the phenomena themselves. Moreover, he maintained a firm belief in certain types of clairvoyance.

Several other pieces of evidence support an active, continuing interest in occultism. Folklorist and satirist Charles Godfrey Leland, who shared many of Bulwer's esoteric interests, reported that Lytton would include 'almost invisible hieroglyphics or crosses in his letters, at least I found them in those to me, as it were for luck'.[27] Leland visited Bulwer at Knebworth in 1870 and found Bulwer very interested in his 'Rosicrucian and occult lore' (p. 250). An earlier visitor to Knebworth is of even more interest. Eliphas Lévi arrived in 1861, along with Count Alexander Braszynsky, a practising alchemist, and is widely reported to have engaged Bulwer in a ritual intended to invoke the spirit of Apollonius of Tyana on the roof of London's Pantheon.[28] Lévi also claimed that Bulwer was present on an earlier attempt at summoning Apollonius. Kenneth Mackenzie, who met with Lévi in Paris in 1861, reported that that the magus had 'rendered a tribute to the versatile knowledge of Lord, then Sir Edward Bulwer, Lytton.'[29] This admiration seems to have been mutual; Bulwer owned several copies of Lévi's books and cited *Dogme et rituel de la haute magie* (*Dogma and Ritual of High Magic*, 1854–1856) in *A Strange Story*.[30]

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[25] See Bulwer, ' Normal Clairvoyance', pp. 33–41.

[26] *Life*, I, 39–41.

[27] Leland, II, 252.

[28] Wolff, p. 263. On the invocation of Apollonius see Godwin, *Theosophical Enlightenment*, pp. 215–16.

[29] Mackenzie, p. 31.

[30] Wolff reports that Lévi gave Bulwer a copy of this text, along with *La Clef des grands mystères* (*The Key to the Grand Mysteries,* 1861) on his visit to Knebworth in 1861 (p. 357n59), which would suggest that Bulwer very likely received the book with enthusiasm, absorbing the text and working it into *A Strange Story* as it was serialised in *All the Year Round* in the last third of 1861 and first months of 1862.

Bulwer's involvement with Lévi and his London rituals is part of a body of evidence on which occultists based claims that he was a member of several secret magical societies. There is no surviving report from Bulwer himself to substantiate such involvement, but occultists began issuing such reports soon after he was no longer around to verify or deny them. Britten stated that she had been a magical neophyte to Bulwer as occult master in the context of a London-based group called the 'Orphic Society' in the 1850s,[31] and, probably building on this claim, Blavatsky reported that Lytton had founded 'a secret school for the practical teaching of magick' which 'collected together […] the most ardent and enterprising as well as some of the most advanced scholars in mesmerism and "ceremonial magic".'[32] Neither of these sources are exactly trustworthy, however. Blavatsky was speaking as Koot Hoomi, and Britten, as discussed in the next chapter, was fond of enhancing her biography with a complex blend of actual and fictional detail.

If Bulwer was involved with an occult group, it is most likely to have been something related to Rosicrucianism, possibly in connection with a rite of Freemasonry. He told occultist and amateur historian Hargrave Jennings that he possessed 'the cipher sign' of the initiate of a 'Rosicrucian Brotherhood' of which, apparently for reasons of secrecy, he could not speak.[33] Victor reported that he was 'a member of the Society of Rosicrucians and Grand Patron of the Order'.[34] It is unclear which group this might be, however. If Bulwer was 'Grand Patron' of a Rosicrucian order, it was likely not the *Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia* (S.R.I.A.). He reacted angrily to being named, apparently *in abstentia*, as this organization's 'Honorary Grand Patron'.[35] This may indicate a desire to keep his occult interests from public attention, but it may also represent an internecine battle surrounding Rosicrucian identity — Bulwer may have seen himself as a member of a rival order claiming true lineage from the first (likely mythical) Rosicrucian brotherhood which announced itself in early seventeenth-century Germany. Given the secrecy of Rosicrucian membership and practice, even Bulwer's own claim to involvement does not bring us much closer to understanding its nature or extent.

Indeed, Bulwer's own account is likely not much more trustworthy than those of Britten and Blavatsky. He is known to have alternately denied and embossed his reputation as a mage in possession of secret wisdom, quite purposefully cultivating the ambiguity surrounding his occult involvement. As Robert Lee Wolff concludes, he tried 'to cover his tracks' at the same time as he

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[31] Britten, *Autobiography*, p. 4.

[32] Claim made by 'Koot Hoomi' in a letter to A.O. Hume. See 'Letter No. XXVIII, K.H. to A.O. Hume', in Barker, p. 210.

[33] Edward Bulwer-Lytton to Hargrave Jennings, 2 July 1870, in *Life*, II, 41–42.

[34] *Life*, II, 41.

[35] McIntosh, *Rosy Cross Unveiled*, p. 110; Godwin, *Theosophical Enlightenment*, p. 218.

embraced occult practice and identity, 'to enjoy the reputation of being a kind of sorcerer while protesting that in fact there was probably nothing in it. He enjoyed mystification as much as mysticism.'[36] It was likely in this vein, rather than a serious claim to magical mastery, that he signed private letters as 'Merlin', 'magus' and 'Le Vieux Sorcier'.[37] Yet, there was also a flicker of alchemical fire beneath all this smoke. Given the weight of evidence as to his occultist activities and social connections, we cannot blame those who, like Blavatsky, felt that Lytton knew 'more than he was prepared to admit in the face of an incredulous public.'[38]

For my current purposes, proving Bulwer's actual involvement is secondary to illustrating the impact of *perceptions* of his occult activities. Whether Bulwer merely pretended to occult experience or actually stood in hierophantic eminence as he summoned spirits and commanded elementals, Jocelyn Godwin is correct to identify him as 'the pivotal figure of nineteenth-century occultism' in Britain;[39] there is no one who played a greater role in transferring both esoteric ideas and occultist enthusiasm from the secret coteries and rare esoteric texts of earlier centuries to the mass reading public of the nineteenth century, not just in Britain but all over the globe. If we can indeed speak of an occult revival, one which spread to varying degrees of effect across the world via colonial cultural power and the enhanced communication networks of the Victorian industrial/technological complex, Bulwer was as much a part of spurring it on as Lévi, Blavatsky, or the Fox sisters. His place in both the political and social hierarchies of the expansive British Empire, along with the cultural sway of his internationally best-selling novels, made him an irresistible source of legitimation for later generations of occultists. There was prestige to be gained by attaching one's ideas to the enigma and (in that period) superstardom of Bulwer-Lytton. Some of these associations were, like those of Britten and Blavatsky, to the legendary persona created by his ambivalent and secretive approach to occult practice. Annie Besant, as important to the Theosophical Society as she was to the advancement of women's rights, reported that her partner in occult scientific exploration, Charles Webster Leadbeater, once saw Bulwer pick up a letter using telekinetic powers. For both Besant and Leadbeater, as well as for C. Nelson Stewart, the occultist biographer who related this account, such stories both substantiated Bulwer's 'actual magical powers',[40] and enhanced their own esoteric belief structures and occultist prestige.

Ultimately, it was less the extent or reality of Bulwer's actual powers that invigorated occultist theory and practice and more his imaginative creations — the occultist as 'literary

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[36] Wolff, p. 158.
[37] Mitchell, pp. 140, 147, 149.
[38] H. P. Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, I, 286.
[39] Godwin, *Theosophical Enlightenment*, p. 195. Cf. p. 128.
[40] Stewart, p. 54. Stewart bases the story on an account provided by Besant in *The Theosophist*, 45.

magician' rather than actual hierophant.[41] The vast majority of references to Bulwer's esoteric wisdom are allusions to his fiction rather than his life. Mackenzie cited the knowledge and experience of the adepts of Bulwer's 1842 occult classic *Zanoni* when providing explanations for why he dare not share 'the real degrees' of masonic Rosicrucianism;[42] Aleister Crowley placed *Zanoni* and *A Strange Story* at the head of a list of recommended reading for neophytes in his *Magick in Theory and Practice* (1929).[43] Blavatsky drew on a range of uncited passages from Lytton's novels in *Isis Unveiled*.[44] T.H. Burgoyne, a founder of the late-century magical group the Hermetic Brotherhood of Luxor, published *The Light of Egypt* (1889) using Zanoni as a sort of alternate pseudonym, an authorial strategy he had begun as editor of the order's publication, the *Occult Magazine*.[45]

Indeed, this entanglement between fiction and the exploration or performance of esoteric knowledge is at play within Bulwer's novels themselves. In general, fiction seems to have provided him with a space in which occult concepts, and perhaps even his own magical experiences, could be explored with less fear of negative reaction from his public and his critics. Faced with mockery of his supernatural interests from some of his peers, including George Eliot, Bulwer may have been nervous, as Mitchell argues, about appearing too committed to the quest for esoteric knowledge.[46] Occult belief and identity may thus have played an important function in Bulwer's development of a fictional mode that seriously explored the scientific legitimacy of supernatural, psychical, and magical concepts — a reverse, but similar strategy to the fictionalisation of himself as magus. A significant number of his novels are defined by characters, themes and settings informed by magical, mesmerist, astrological, and Spiritualist phenomena, from some of the first, like *Godolphin* (1833) and *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1834),[47] to one of the last, *The Coming Race*. While many of these narrative elements no more indicate real life occult engagement than Frankenstein's necromancy identifies Mary Shelley as a witch, others are clearly imbued with philosophical resonance by Bulwer's personal occult scientific research. Mapping the relationship between life and fiction can, as discussed further in Chapter Four, be critically hazardous, but interpreting Bulwer's fiction in light of his private letters, published essays, and known occultist affiliations offers rewards too great for this approach to be ignored.

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[41] Deveney, *Paschal Beverly Randolph*, p. 33.

[42] Kenneth Mackenzie to William Wynn Westcott, 24 March 1881, qtd. in McIntosh, *Rosy Cross Unveiled*, p. 110.

[43] Seed, Introduction to *The Coming Race*, p. xlii.

[44] Liljegren, p. 8. Huckvale (p. 138) counts fifteen references to Bulwer-Lytton in *Isis Unveiled*. Cf. Kripal, *Mutants and Mystics*, pp. 48–49.

[45] See Godwin, *Theosophical Enlightenment*, p. 355.

[46] Mitchell, pp. 149–50.

[47] On esoteric aspects of these two novels, see Wolff, pp. 149–52.

The novel most permeated by esoteric concepts, practices, and imagery is *Zanoni*. Bulwer directly linked this novel to serious occult exploration, as he claimed that its outlines and one of its main characters (Mejnour) were revealed to him in a dream in 1835, at a time when he was immersed in study of 'astrology and the so-called "occult sciences"'.[48] *Zanoni* shows initial stirrings of the narrative strategies that would later lead Bulwer to develop an SF mode, including a presentation of ancient magical knowledge as modern, or even future science, a coagulation of evolutionary and magical theory that anticipates the occult superhuman, or 'new age' of humanity, that would later re-emerge in *The Coming Race*, and an epistemological openness that comfortably situates modern technoscientific and magical concepts within the same epistemic framework. Yet, in *Zanoni* this epistemological openness is still presented as a contrast between spiritual and empirical knowledge — 'We commenc[e] research', says Zanoni of his ancient Chaldean brotherhood, 'Where modern Conjecture closes its faithless wings' (p. 253). Unlike later novels, *Zanoni*'s explanations for occult phenomena are rarely in dialogue with scientific theories and paradigms of Bulwer's day. Magic is linked to 'a dextrous use of electricity' (p. 87), but the connection is largely unexplored and medieval and early modern Hermetic concepts take up the bulk of the intellectual load.

I want to focus, therefore, on several later texts in which Bulwer appears to have very consciously adjusted his representations of occult phenomena in order to appeal to readers affected by the increasing rigour of enframing. The first is *The Haunted and the Haunters; or, The House and the Brain*, originally printed in *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1859. In addition to the magical elements already prevalent in earlier fiction, this novella explores mesmerist and Spiritualist phenomena in a manner that reflects the claim to scientific validity frequently emphasised in both traditions. Bulwer's hero is a psychical researcher of a skeptical bent similar to that of the author himself — a man open to a wide gamut of possibility, but closed to forming belief in any particular phenomenon without first subjecting it to a battery of empirical and experiential tests. Through this affectation of scientific method, naturalistic explanations for the novella's occult phenomena are discovered, including an occult technological device found to be broadcasting the psychic frequencies of a vengeful mesmerist-magus named Richards. More importantly, Bulwer includes long sections of didactic dialogue between Richards and the psychical researcher narrator, in which the technological or empirical causes behind apparently spectral events are revealed.[49]

Bulwer soon absorbed aspects of *Haunted* into *A Strange Story*, published two years later in Charles Dickens's *All the Year Round*. He therefore republished *Haunted* in redacted form, cutting

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[48] *Life*, II, 32. Cf. Wolff, pp. 159, 203.
[49] See, e.g., *HH*, pp. 98–104.

out Richards and leaving only the occult machine as a naturalistic explanatory mechanism. This does not, however, indicate a retreat from his intention to explore the possibilities of magical, mesmerist, or Spiritualist knowledge via scientific romance. He assured his readers of the continued need for 'persons of critical and inquisitive intellect […] to divest what is genuine in these apparent vagaries of Nature',[50] a conviction that continued to motivate him in writing *Strange Story*. In the novel's preface, Bulwer stated a gothic desire to 'avail himself of such sources of pity or terror as flow from the Marvellous'. However, he offered a modification of this fantastic appeal that would have enormous ramifications for the development of science fiction. The marvellous, he argued, could only be engendered 'in proportion as the wonders [the author] narrates are of a kind to excite the curiosity of the age he addresses.' 'The brains of our time', Bulwer noted, wonder at curious phenomena with one breath, 'and in the next breath, ask, "How do you account for it?"' (I, viii).

To satisfy this requirement he 'presumed to borrow from science some elements of interest for Romance', hoping 'that no thoughtful reader — and certainly no true son of science — [would] be disposed to reproach him' (I, ix). Bulwer's view of his method as a borrowing from science in order to enrich romance recalls Wells's presentation of his 1890s fiction as seminal because of its creation of scientific verisimilitude via 'an ingenious use of scientific patter'.[51] In fact, it had become common by Wells's time to deploy the discourse of science in this way, particularly in cases where authors borrowed occult themes and concepts, which were, like the novums of science fiction, *already* creative adaptations of scientific knowledge, attractively, even convincingly, dressed with scientific discourse. It would be equally reductive to attribute this method to Bulwer alone, but he certainly deployed the same strategy in *A Strange Story*, thirty-three years before Wells's first story appeared in print. To ensure the novel's material was received as authentic by 'the brains' of his time, Bulwer included long expository footnotes, citations to pertinent scientific sources, lengthy philosophical or scientific dialogues, and scientific terminology. He also presaged Wells in narrating his stories in the voice of young men of status who have been trained in a scientific scepticism that lends verisimilitude to encounters with the unencounterable. 'The narrator of a fiction', he noted in the preface, 'Must be as thoroughly in earnest as if he were the narrator of facts' (I, ix).

The narrator of *Strange Story* precisely fits the mould of trained scientific analyst. Allen Fenwick, a medical doctor, begins the novel as a strict materialist, rejecting the very possibility of phenomena like magic and mesmerist clairvoyance. However, this scepticism is combined with an epistemological openness that encourages him to dutifully engage with even the most apparently

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[50] Bulwer-Lytton, *Strange Story and the Haunted and the Haunters*, p. 325.
[51] Wells, 'Preface', np.

ridiculous knowledge claims. He encounters successful mesmerist doctors, eerily accurate clairvoyants, and, most of all, a magician named Margrave who seems capable of incredible magical feats. The novel frequently departs from its plot to frame debates surrounding the reality and potential causes of these phenomena, whether physical, psychological, spiritual, or imaginative. The epistemological perspective of Fenwick, the archetypal representative of sceptical, empirical knowledge, is set against Margrave (sensuous, animalistic instinct), his fiancée Lilian (spiritual soul-knowledge), his friend Mrs. Poyntz (the socially convenient knowledge of 'the World'), and his mentor Dr Faber (naturalistic knowledge combined with metaphysical priorities).

Bulwer explained this representational structure to Dickens as the novel was being serialised in *All the Year Round*, in a letter that indicates his anxieties of interpretation.[52] Bulwer worried that his readers would not understand the depth of his intentions and proposed to attach an interpretation following the last chapter. Dickens resisted the idea, but when Bulwer published the novel in a single edition the next year he attached his interpretive framework anyway. What did he feel so driven to explain that he ignored the advice of the most successful novelist of his age? 'Why the supernatural is a legitimate province of fiction. But also, how the supernatural resolves itself into the natural when faced and sifted'.[53] The first priority was nothing new for Bulwer; he had been mining the magical, paranormal, and supernatural for enchantment and creative inspiration since the 1830s. The second concern, however, indicates that he had shifted, along with other occultists responding to the currents of enframing, toward a more firmly naturalistic approach to occult phenomena than that represented in *Zanoni*. Combined, these two concerns illustrate the manner in which science fiction and occultism could come together in attempting to present the supernatural and supernormal as soon to be discovered naturalistic realities. Bulwer's determination to ensure that his readers would be aware of this intellectual context, as well as the authorial strategies used to communicate it, indicates his historical importance as a conscious framer of an SF mode.

In this specific case, however, he had good reason to be concerned that readers would easily misunderstand his intentions. The supernatural phenomena explored in the novel's first half are largely related to mesmerism, clairvoyance, and vitalism[54] — all knowledge sets that still held at least the vestiges of scientific marginality. The second half, however, contains episodes of possession, spirit invocation, and ritual magic. As Bulwer told Dickens, 'The parts which would seem most to require explanation are the concluding scenes, which appear those of

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[52] *Life*, II, 345–47. Cf. Wolff, pp. 288–96.
[53] *Life*, II, 345.
[54] See, e.g., *SS*, I, 165, 170, 221.

demonology.'[55] In these climactic scenes, Margrave, with Fenwick's assistance, summons elemental spirits as part of a ritual for preparing the elixir of life. Bulwer's anxieties of interpretation seem quite logical in light of these events. He proposed to insert a long dialogue between Faber and Fenwick that would 'anticipate the objections of those who don't think'.[56] Dickens also resisted this didactic strategy,[57] but here Bulwer had his way, an unfortunate development for the literary quality of *Strange Story*, but a fortunate one for those who wish to understand the relationship between veracity and verisimilitude in his fiction.

Bulwer's scenes of 'demonology' are described with vivid 'phantasmagoria' (*SS*, II, 92), devoid of any of the engagement with scientific theory or discourse that might be expected of the SF mode. These scenes, combined with the novel's various other occult concepts and events, have likely contributed to its absence from SF histories, barring Roberts's inclusion of the novel in a sub-genre of 'mystical' SF.[58] As discussed in the previous chapter, this category, though proposed with inclusive intentions, is indicative of processes of genre exclusion that have plagued literary-historical assessments of SF, in which occultism plays the bogeyman 'other' to science fiction's perception of itself as rationalist and empiricist.

Bulwer's representations of occult science in *Strange Story* are far from mystical. The novel's debates surrounding mesmerist healing and clairvoyance directly dialogue with still ongoing scientific investigations in these areas; though they were in the process of shifting to more respectable avenues like hypnotism and psychical research, these occult scientific concepts were certainly still current in the age. Moreover, as I will shortly illustrate, even the demonology finds empirical solutions in the novel. Its representations of magical and mesmerist phenomena are a blend of gothic trope and scientific reportage, but it seems that even Bulwer's demonological ending was intended to communicate his belief that nature still held many occult mysteries worth investigating. 'I don't think the ending […] is too fantastic,' he told his son, calling it 'the finest thing in point of interior meaning I ever wrote. […] I leave the whole to be solved either way, viz.: — entirely by physiological causes, or by the admission of causes that may be in Nature, but physiology as yet rejects as natural.'[59] There could be no better indication of the historically specific characteristics of the SF mode in the nineteenth century than Bulwer's feeling that he could expect his reader to apply the dictates of scientific naturalism to the brewing of the elixir of life inside a magic circle.

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[55] *Life*, II, 346.
[56] *Life*, II, 345.
[57] Wolff, p. 295.
[58] Roberts, *History of Science Fiction,* p. 116.
[59] Edward Bulwer-Lytton to Robert Bulwer-Lytton, 19 November 1861, in *Life*, II, 401.

Haunted has been similarly invisible to SF historians. John Clute is unique in observing its science fictional elements, but represents the bulk of SF scholarship — and Bulwer criticism — in declaring *Coming Race* Bulwer's 'sole sf novel proper'.[60] The fact that this last of Bulwer's occult novels has long been associated with science fiction indicates the important function of recognisable tropes and rhetorics in embedding particular works within a science fictional membrane. As Wolff observes, *Coming Race* has 'very little […] left of the occult machinery' that gave Bulwer's earlier works their 'characteristic mystery' (p. 323). Indeed, there is little mention of immortality, occult orders, and magical ethics in the novel's hollow Earth society. In their place Bulwer has fashioned flying machines and an alien race called the Vril-ya, setting them in the utopian framework common to scientific romances of the period. However, the novel continues Bulwer's examination of occult knowledge, particularly mesmerist phenomena, and does so by synthesising modern and traditional theories of magical praxis. Together with *Haunted* and *Strange Story*, this later text can be read as part of a sustained thought experiment regarding the reality and potential causes of esoteric phenomena, one from which Bulwer evolved a telepathic explanation for occult experience.

Bulwer's magical mesmerism

Bulwer's theory of telepathy was formed over the course of decades of research into a variety of unexplained phenomena, but it particularly emerged from his dedication to mesmerism, especially his interest in an imaginal, magical form he called 'mesmeric clairvoyance'.[61] From the 1830s to the 1850s, mesmerism occupied a mainstream, if much contested, place in Anglo-American medical and scientific debate. As the century went on this currency faded, but in the mid-century period in which Bulwer researched various aspects of mesmerism it still had well-respected scientific advocates. These included A.R. Wallace, who engaged in a public row with William Benjamin Carpenter, an important early theorist of the unconscious who included mesmerism in a category of 'Epidemic Delusion', arguing that mesmeric effects were the result of a separation of conscious and unconscious states rather than the action of a mesmerist.[62] That two well-respected researchers could hold such diverging views is partly due to the resistance of phenomena like clairvoyance and mesmerist healing to conventional empirical research methods. Even advocates like Baron Dupotet were forced to admit that they could not be verified in the

[60] Clute, np. Cf. Huckvale, p. 211; Mitchell, p. 227; Roberts, *History of Science Fiction*, p. 116.
[61] Bulwer-Lytton, 'Normal Clairvoyance', p. 33.
[62] Wallace, 'Review of *Mesmerism, Spiritualism*', pp. 414–15; Carpenter, *Mesmerism, Spiritualism*, pp. v, 6.

same way as more immediately physical events.[63] It was also, however, due to the sheer diversity of mesmerisms. Wallace and Carpenter agreed that phenomena like the trance state existed, but they diverged widely in their beliefs as to its cause and uses. Other scientists introduced competing mesmerist theories, including 'phreno-magnetism', 'electrobiology', and the 'Od' or 'Odyle' of Baron von Reichenbach.[64] A further plurality of non-scientific voices added proofs and displays of a range of other mesmerist theories and phenomena; the mid-century audience to which Bulwer pitched his occult science fictional novels had very likely witnessed mesmerism in public exhibitions of psychical healing or clairvoyance,[65] come across its advocacy or critique in papers and periodicals, or encountered it in the fictional representations of authors from Poe to Dickens.

The range of mesmerist theories, practices, and representations can be distilled to three broad currents. During Dupotet's impactful visit to London in the 1830s, he was already able to divide the science along tripartite lines: a materialist school derived from Mesmer; a second current of 'magnetic somnambulism', inaugurated by the Marquis de Puységur, focused on the trance state;[66] and a third strand originating at Lyon with the Chevalier de Barbarin, who, in tandem with the Martinist Freemason Louis Claude de Saint-Martin, inaugurated a magico-mystical strain of mesmerism which prioritised the action of the soul rather than matter (Mesmer) or mind (Puységur).[67] Mesmerists could rarely be strictly defined by any one of these broad categories. Bulwer was no exception. He believed in the efficacy and importance of each, though over a forty-year period of research and experimentation he came to prioritise the magical, imaginal strain.

The materialists retained Mesmer's focus on the manipulation of a physical fluid, but expanded and adapted the concept to respond to more recent discoveries such as electro-magnetism. Most fluidists tended toward syncretisation of the various fluids and forces flying around in the nineteenth century,[68] though others, like Samuel Underhill, accused the concept of one universal fluid of intellectual 'laziness' (p. 24). Fluidists tended to argue for naturalistic explanations and empirical substantiation of mesmeric phenomena, but efforts to substantiate fluid-based mesmerism contrasted unfavourably with continued successes in the study of forces like electro-magnetism, and the theory lost currency in scientific circles by the 1850s.[69]

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[63] Dupotet de Sennevoy, *Introduction to the Study of Animal Magnetism*, pp. x–xi.

[64] On Od see Moore, p. 30.

[65] See Winter, 'Mesmerism and Popular Culture', p. 319. On the spread of mesmerism in Britain, see Winter, *Mesmerized*, esp. pp. 32–59; Van Schlun, pp. 47–60; Oppenheim, pp. 210–17.

[66] Dupotet de Sennevoy, *Introduction to the Study of Animal Magnetism*, p. 16.

[67] Ibid. pp. 17–18. On the 'magnetizers of Lyon', see Gauld, pp. 64–67.

[68] See, for example, Grimes, p. 15; Townshend, pp. 398–99, 417.

[69] On the decline of fluidic mesmerism, see Gauld, pp. 212–14, 264–66.

The trance-based ideas of Puységurian mesmerism, however, had more staying power. Puységur saw the question of the *cause* of mesmerist phenomena as largely irrelevant. He was much more concerned with the *effect* — the fascinating properties of the trance state, which he called 'artificial somnambulism'.[70] He found that he could access a different, unconscious self in his patients, one capable of the transfer of image and sensation between mesmeriser and mesmerised, and, more rarely, between the patient and more distant minds, even those of the dead. He found that somnambulists were also capable of clairvoyant vision, an ability that could be used to scry inside the body to assess the source of illness, and even suggest remedies. By the time mesmerism caught on in the Anglosphere in the 1830s, most of its theorisations, even those with a largely materialist focus, involved the trance state.[71] As scholars like Adam Crabtree have shown, this dialogue with the unconscious was an important precursor to both psychoanalysis and hypnotism.[72] The latter was introduced in 1842 by James Braid, who stripped mesmerism of its fluidic function and rejected the possibility of clairvoyance or thought-transference, while the trance state — provoked by visual fixation — remained central.[73] Mesmerist trance and its associated abilities and effects were also crucial to the development of Spiritualist mediumship.[74]

Puységur's ideas also influenced magical and mystical mesmerist practices. Beginning with the magnetisers of Lyon, some of whom discovered that they could provoke out-of-body experiences and speak to spirits and angels while in the trance state, mesmerism proved attractive to Rosicrucians, Freemasons, Martinists, and ritual magicians — largely in France and Germany, but also, in a more muted, esoteric fashion, in Britain.[75] It is possible that Dupotet advocated magical applications of mesmerism along with the fluidist healing techniques he showed to Elliotson. Like many mesmerists, Dupotet saw historical continuity between modern mesmerism and ancient magic: 'What is the Somnambulic Sleep? An effect of magical power. What is Magnetism at a distance, i.e. as exercised by thought without (physical) contact, unless it be a secret power similar to that exercised by lovers, magicians, and others?'[76] Dupotet detailed a number of experiments that blurred the already fuzzy lines between magic and mesmerism in his *La Magie Dévoilée* (1852), including the construction of a magic mirror in which subjects 'entirely

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[70] On Puységur, see Crabtree, *From Mesmer to Freud*, pp. 38–53; Gauld, pp. 29–49, 111–16.

[71] Winter, *Mesmerized*, p. 41.

[72] Crabtree, 'Mesmer and Animal Magnetism', pp. 233–34; Crabtree, *From Mesmer to Freud*. Cf. Tatar, pp. 29–44.

[73] See Braid, *Neurypnology*, p. 4ff. Cf. Van Schlun, pp. 58–60; Oppenheim, pp. 214–15.

[74] On mesmerism's enfolding into Spiritualism see Gauld, p. 214; McCorristine, p. xxii.

[75] Crabtree, *From Mesmer to Freud*, pp. 190–212; Gauld, pp. 66–67; Godwin, *Theosophical Enlightenment*, p. 154. On early forms of magical mesmerism in Britain, see Godwin, *Theosophical Enlightenment*, p. 157; in France see Darnton, pp. 68–69; in Germany see Godwin, *Theosophical Enlightenment*, p. 61; Taves, p. 140.

[76] Dupotet de Sennevoy, *Magnetism and Magic*, p. 59.

sceptical about magic' viewed spirits and other visions.[77] His magical mesmerism was admired by occultists later in the century, and by at least one contemporary, Eliphas Lévi. In his *Histoire de la Magie* (1860) Lévi was enthusiastic about his countryman's mirror experiments, and described him as first among the mesmerists in France, a 'specially intuitive' man who, despite his ignorance of kabbalah, had somehow managed to divine the secret of the 'universal light'[78] — a natural and spiritual cosmic medium similar to the ether which Lévi believed to underlie both animal magnetism and his own concept of the 'astral light'.[79] Bulwer possessed a copy of *Histoire de la Magie*, and may thus have been textually influenced by Dupotet's magical mesmerism, if he had not already discussed it with the Fourth Earl Stanhope, a friend frequently met at Lady Blessington's salon, and a staunch supporter of Dupotet during his eventful stay in London.[80]

The popularity of magical mesmerism indicates that, as Betsy van Schlun observes, Bulwer's own magical adaptations were no 'particularity of the author'.[81] The synthesis of mesmerism with magic, alchemy, astral travel, and Spiritualism that appears in Bulwer's novels was built out of ongoing developments in occultism, the mental sciences, and medical theory; it was simultaneously drawn from venerable esoteric wisdom and — in a way that can only feel uncannily anachronistic to the modern perspective — cutting-edge science. Mesmerism likely proved so attractive to Bulwer, ever the epistemological kleptomaniac, *precisely because* it sprawled across such a wide contextual space, its intellectual claws scrabbling both at the hard clay of rigid naturalistic experimentation and the more permeable loam of the supernatural. He spoke often on the subject, sometimes in letters to friends, occasionally in essays, but most of all in the pages of his occult fiction. In doing so he engaged with a science that, because of its perpetually pre-paradigmatic and hotly debated nature, proved particularly useful for the creation of a science fictional mode.

Mesmerism was frequently explored, communicated, mocked, and rejected in literature of the period. Melville, Hawthorne, and Henry James used their fiction to criticise the movement, while many of the period's leading literary figures, including Dickens, Poe, Balzac, and Hugo, represented mesmerism in a more nuanced light that reflected personal interest and belief.[82] Bulwer's deployment of mesmerist theory and phenomena was arguably more sustained than any of these. He first explored mesmerism in *Godolphin*, where, at the time of the first edition in

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[77] Ibid. p. 70. Cf. pp. 79–83.

[78] Lévi, p. 492.

[79] See ibid. p. 271. On Lévi's astral light and the development of his magical-mesmerist thought under the influence of a group of French 'spiritualistic magnetists' including Dupotet, see Strube, 'The "Baphomet" of Eliphas Lévi', pp. 64–68.

[80] Godwin, *Theosophical Enlightenment*, p. 180.

[81] Van Schlun, p. 140.

[82] See Darnton, pp. 153–59; Van Schlun, pp. 7–9; Tatar, pp. 190–91.

1833, he initially cast it in a negative light. However, he soon encountered mesmerism on the road to Damascus. In an 1840 republication of the novel he retracted his earlier rejection of the science, noting that since the novel's publication 'grave physicians' lecturing in London in 1838, and 'my friend, Mr. [Chauncy] Hare Townshend', had convinced him of the value of animal magnetism. Townshend in particular, a man 'above all suspicion of imposture' had convinced Bulwer of 'the success of his […] experiments' in his widely read *Facts in Mesmerism* (1840).[83]

Following this 1838 change of mind, Bulwer remained excited about mesmerism's physical possibilities for the remainder of his life. He argued at this time that the facts of mesmerism required 'the admission either of an agency in nature hitherto unnoticed, or, what is tantamount, the admission that new functions shall be ascribed to some known agent [and] that this agency is material'.[84] He corresponded with Elliotson, praising his orations on mesmerism's medical benefits, and introduced these benefits to Harriet Martineau, who shared her positive experiences with mesmerist methods with numerous readers of the *Athenaeum* in an 1844 series called *Letters on Mesmerism*.[85] Bulwer was still recommending mesmerist treatment to friends as late as 1866.[86] Family friend T.H.S. Escott relates that the author was visited by a mesmerist on a daily basis at around the time of the writing of *Strange Story*, a man 'in whom he believed as the healer of all his ailments, but who never succeeded in throwing him into the trance' (p. 91). This material aspect of Bulwer's mesmerism was probably upheld by a constant sickliness and corresponding distrust of doctors,[87] but his interests ranged wider than mere healing; he also experimented with what Carpenter called 'pansilinic telegraphy', which involved using snails that had been paired using mesmeric sympathy to send messages across long distances.[88]

This materialist, healing-focused animal magnetism plays an important role in Bulwer's fiction, nowhere more so than in *Coming Race*, which is centrally predicated on an evaluation of fluidic mesmerism. Bulwer's vril represents the fluidist tendency to elide animal magnetism under the aegis of a universal fluid, a 'unity in natural energic agencies, which has been conjectured by many philosophers above ground' (p. 38). As a result of its universal agency, vril contains the full gamut of Victorian fluids and forces: it is used to power airships (electricity), alter weather patterns (light, heat), 'exercise influence over minds' (mesmerism, magic; p. 38), and vitalise otherwise lifeless automata (vitalism, galvanism). It also enables mesmerist healing powers. Though it has been argued that the novel does not contain 'any straightforward depictions of

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[83] Bulwer-Lytton, *Godolphin*, p. 3.
[84] Bulwer-Lytton, 'Animal Magnetism', pp. 29–30.
[85] Wolff, pp. viii, 90–91, 236–37; Winter, *Mesmerized*, p. 221.
[86] Mitchell, p. 146.
[87] See 'Confessions of a Water Patient', *New Monthly Magazine*, 1845, reprinted in *Life*, II, pp. 24–28.
[88] Mitchell, p. 146. On pansilinic telegraphy see Carpenter, *Mesmerism, Spiritualism*, p. 68; Gregory, *Animal Magnetism*, pp. 94–96.

mesmerism as a practice',[89] patients take baths in water charged with vril, a technique clearly derived from Mesmer's original baquet techniques,[90] and diseases are 'removed with ease by scientific applications of that agency' (p. 199). In order for vril to do any of these things, it must be manipulated by the will, an aspect of mesmerist theory that had become dominant by Bulwer's time after it was given increased prominence by J.P.F. Deleuze's influential *Histoire critique du magnétisme animal* (1813).[91]

However, the Vril-ya also apply will to the vril force for less explicitly physical means which blend into trance and magical currents. They use artificial somnambulism to calm Tish — the novel's evolutionarily disadvantaged human narrator — in order to learn information from him via telepathy and to teach him their language by reversing this mental communication. These psychic powers reflect Bulwer's excitement regarding the undiscovered mental country currently being explored by occultists, psychical researchers, and mental physiologists like Carpenter and Braid. He approached mental science with his usual mix of eager exploration and cynicism. This ambivalence is reflected in *The Coming Race*. Tish shows astonishment at the abilities which extend from the Vril-ya's use of artificial somnambulism, to which Zee, his primary companion among the Vril-ya, responds by asking if 'it was not known that all the faculties of the mind could be quickened to a degree unknown in the waking state, by trance or vision, in which the thoughts of one brain could be transmitted to another, and knowledge be thus rapidly interchanged.' Tish admits that this sounds like reports he's heard of 'mesmeric clairvoyance', but assures her that this phenomenon has 'fallen much into disuse or contempt' as a result of charlatanry and the unreliability of mesmerist phenomena. The Vril-ya, she replies, had once been similarly sceptical in 'the infancy of their knowledge' (p. 39). Zee's response indicates several important aspects of Bulwer's fictionalisation of mesmerism. First, the idea that a further maturation of scientific knowledge of the trance state would substantiate the transmission of thought is an example of the important function of hypothesis in both occultism and science fictional texts like *Coming Race*. Second, Tish's connection of trance-based psychic powers to 'mesmeric clairvoyance' indicates that Bulwer still saw mesmerism as a contributor to mental physiology.

Third, however, Tish's response also reflects a series of doubts regarding mesmerism which Bulwer developed following his initial excitement. Both these doubts and a continuing faith, particularly in trance- and imagination-based forms of mesmerism, are on display in 'On the Normal Clairvoyance of the Imagination'. Bulwer notes that his research into mesmeric

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[89] Budge, p. 40. For a contrasting opinion more in line with my own interpretation, see Van Schlun, pp. 165–68.

[90] *TCR*, p. 87. On the baquet, see Crabtree, *From Mesmer to Freud*, pp. 13–14.

[91] See Godwin, *Theosophical Enlightenment*, p. 154.

clairvoyance has revealed it to be 'capricious and uncertain', failing to repeat its wonders when subjected to empirical testing (p. 34). Yet, based on his own experience and 'evidence so respectable that I will assume it to be sufficient', he cannot deny its reality either. He thus turns to the imagination to explain what he feels to be an ability for 'second-sight', a 'seeing through other organs than the eyes' which allows clear vision of other places and other times within the mind (p. 36). All 'healthful brains' possess this ability (p. 35), but it is fully developed in the truly great artists, inventors, and scientists — Shakespeare is 'the peerless prince of clairvoyants'; 'Newton's clairvoyance is not less marvelous', and Bulwer himself claimed to have arrived for the first time in places he had already described in fiction, only to find them exactly as his imagination had already envisioned them (p. 38).

This attribution of clairvoyance to the imagination has been seen as a rejection of mesmerism,[92] but it is more accurate to say that it reflects a general shift from materialist mesmerism to post-Puysegerian and magical forms that placed more emphasis on the mind. In another 1864 essay Bulwer relates his enthusiasm for the theories of James Braid. He had attended one of Braid's demonstrations and was impressed with his ability to put subjects in a somnambular state using only 'the concentration of sight and mind on a single object'.[93] Braid was thus able, in Bulwer's view, to 'communicate with their inward intelligence', without resorting to the mesmerist passes or other fluid-based practices which he had found unreliable.[94] Though Braid announced his theory of hypnotism as a radical break with mesmerism, Bulwer agreed with mesmerists like John Campbell Colquhoun, who he cites in *Strange Story*, that Braid's hypnotism was evidently 'nothing more than an offshoot' of the older science.[95] Bulwer, however, remained enthusiastic about hypnotism because it possessed one important quality that separated Braid from 'his fellow Thaumaturgists, the mesmerizers'; namely, the good fortune to have been empirically validated 'by the experiments of very eminent and cautious philosophers and physicians'.[96]

Bulwer's connection of Braid to thaumaturgy — he also envisions Braid's hypnotising hand as an 'enchanter's wand'[97] — indicates that he saw magical applications in trance-based psychic communication with the 'inward intelligence'. Bulwer's 'normal clairvoyance' had similarly magical connections. His belief that any time or place could be envisaged within the mind is situated in a venerable 'scrying' tradition, in which practitioners attempt to envisage other times,

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[92] See, e.g., Mitchell, p. 144.
[93] Bulwer-Lytton, 'On the Distinction between Active Thought and Reverie', p. 131.
[94] Ibid. p. 132.
[95] Colquhoun, p. xxxvii.
[96] Bulwer-Lytton, 'On the Distinction between Active Thought and Reverie', p. 132.
[97] Ibid. p. 132.

places and spiritual realities, or make contact with spiritual beings, particularly angels and elemental spirits.[98] Normal clairvoyance also required, like hypnotism, mesmerism, and a number of other occultist theorisations of magical praxis, the practice of intense visualisation: 'The gift of seeing through other organs than the eyes is more or less accurately shared by all in whom imagination is strongly concentred upon any selected object, however distant and apart from the positive experience of material senses'.[99]

This increased interest in psychical and imaginal applications did not mean a complete rejection of fluidic mesmerism. Rather, like many fluidists of the period, Bulwer updated his physics. Of all the fluids and forces streaming through the scientific ether in the nineteenth century, Bulwer had selected electricity as one perhaps more reliably quantifiable and sensible than others such as Odyle and animal magnetism. *The Coming Race* turns to Michael Faraday, the scientist most responsible for clarifying the nature of electromagnetism, as the human equivalent of the Vril-ya scientists who discovered the psychic powers made possible by vril. The essence of Bulwer's mesmerist novum in the novel was to 'suppose the existence of a race charged with […] electricity and having acquired the art to concentre and direct it.'[100]

This emphasis on electricity was a fictionalisation of an actual shift in which Bulwer connected animal magnetism to electricity by identifying both as currents of the universal fluid. 'Whatever there may be genuine in mesmerism', he told his editor, John Forster, was but 'a mere branch current' of electricity.[101] He attributed a wide gamut of mesmerist and magical phenomena to this current. Shortly before writing *Coming Race* he responded to a request for scientific advice from the London Dialectical Society, established in 1867 to research the phenomena of Spiritualism. The letter was included in a report submitted to the society in 1870, along with a range of testimony from leading Spiritualists and influential scientists like Huxley and Tyndall. Bulwer reported his belief that there were persons with 'certain physical organisations or temperaments' who could produce effects such as 'clairvoyance, spirit manifestation, or witchcraft'. In people with these temperaments, 'I have invariably found a marked comparative preponderance of the electric fluid; and the phenomena are more or less striking in proportion to the electricity of the atmosphere.'[102] Bulwer had already reached this conclusion years earlier while writing *Strange Story*. Outlining the same theory, he told Forster that it was on the basis of

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[98] For the history of scrying in England, with discussion of the practice in Bulwer's time, see Godwin, *Theosophical Enlightenment*, pp. 169–86.

[99] Bulwer-Lytton, 'Normal Clairvoyance', p. 37. On the importance of imagination and visualisation in modern magic, see Hanegraaff, 'How Magic Survived', pp. 366–69; Owen, *Place of Enchantment*, pp. 149–50.

[100] Edward Bulwer-Lytton to John Forster, 20 March 1870, in *Life*, II, 467.

[101] Ibid. p. 466.

[102] *Report on Spiritualism*, pp. 240–41.

such electrically enhanced 'Media and Mesmerists' that 'I do believe in the substance of what used to be called Magic'.[103]

Elsewhere, Bulwer specified the sort of mind that would be susceptible to these electrical impulses, identifying a 'sympathy' possessed by particular individuals of an 'impressionable nervous temperament', more sensitive to the '*rapport*' of feelings and perceptions around them, whether emitting from other beings or from nature.[104] He directly connected this sympathy to mesmerism, noting that this rapport was similar to that of the 'hysterical somnambule'. This sensitivity to 'electricity' — again, a force with the much wider applications of the universal fluid in Bulwer's system — was the basis for at least two contrasting explanations for occult phenomena. In the first, Bulwer theorised that because 'electricity is in inanimate objects as well as animate', mediums and magicians could gain power 'over inanimate objects', thus offering a materialist argument for occult phenomena from turning tables to mind control.

The 'novum' of telepathy

A second hypothesis amounted to a theory of telepathy. This was the essence of his conclusion to his Dialectical Society report. Though he did not believe, following his experiments, that Spiritualist phenomena were the result of interaction with human spirits, he also could not deny the claims and abilities of mediums like Home.[105] The key to this apparent paradox, he said, was in the function of the human mind and its ability to 'convey any impression to the auditor or spectator.'[106] Bulwer thus turned to his magical mesmerism, centrally organised around the idea of shared imaginal experience mediated by the electrical universal fluid, to explain a variety of occult phenomena. This theory of mental transference can be found throughout his occult-themed novels, providing an empiricist explanation for occult experience which generates an SF mode. Indeed, though his letter to the Dialectical Society, his 'Normal Clairvoyance' essay, and letters to Forster make clear that Bulwer envisioned the imagination as a power which could communicate images from place to place and from mind to mind, it is difficult to discern solely from these materials just exactly *how* he envisaged this communication to occur, and to what extent he believed this telepathic function to underlie occult phenomena. Fortunately, Bulwer's blend of fiction with serious scientific inquiry allows some glimpses on this front that can complement the more reliable positions stated elsewhere.

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[103] Edward Bulwer-Lytton to John Forster, 3 December 1861, in *Life*, II, 47–49.
[104] Bulwer-Lytton, 'Sympathetic Temperament', p. 176.
[105] *Report on Spiritualism*, pp. 240–41.
[106] Ibid.

Richards, the 'great mesmeriser' of *Haunted*, is able to produce the experience of magical and Spiritualist effects via mediation of impressions between his mind and other minds. *Haunted* contains an eight-page dialogue establishing both ancient magic and modern-day occult phenomena as the result of natural, though poorly understood forces (pp. 86–94). Like Bulwer in his letter to Forster, the novella's psychical researcher narrator proposes two naturalistic theories for the Spiritualist phenomena he has encountered in the 'haunted' house. They may be the result of 'a power akin to mesmerism, and superior to it — the power that in the old days was called Magic', which might allow objects permeated with this power to be manipulated by 'constitutions with certain peculiarities' (p. 61). The narrator seems more interested, however, in the idea that his occult experiences are the result of telepathic communications amplified by the occult machine and mediated by 'a material fluid — call it Electric, call it Odic, call it what you will' (p. 38). Through these 'invisible currents one human brain may transmit its ideas to other human brains with the same rapidity as a thought promulgated by visible means.' Because 'thought is imperishable', the narrator theorises, images formed in the minds of those now dead could be received, with the help of a powerful mesmeriser like Richards, in the mind of the living (p. 95). Richards's explanation for this remarkable phenomenon directly channels the language Bulwer would go on to use in 'The Normal Clairvoyance of the Imagination': 'To what extent can thought extend? Think, and before you draw breath you are in China!' (p. 95).

This fictionally developed theory directly reflects its author's extratextual musings surrounding mesmeric clairvoyance. Whether fictional or not, Bulwer's telepathy is situated in a complex web of contemporary scientific debates. His ideas represent, first of all, a general nineteenth-century movement from fluidic to more imagination-based explanations for mesmerism and theories of magic and mediumship derived from it.[107] The 'psychometry' theorised in the 1840s by Joseph Rhodes Buchanan, an American physician, is a related example. Buchanan theorised that particular human minds possess a sensitivity that allows them to discern the nature of objects, without engaging the regular senses and, as with Bulwer's normal clairvoyance, with or without precipitating a trance state. Hanegraaff has shown that psychometry played a definitive role in shaping later occultist and Theosophical concepts of clairvoyance, which emphasised the ability as a largely imaginal form of second-sight.[108] Here, once again, Bulwer's thought presaged later occult developments — it is quite possible in fact that his fiction, much read by occultists, influenced this imaginal shift.

Another important nineteenth-century context is the argument of leading mental physiologists that mesmerist and other occult phenomena were the result of the power of

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[107] See Van Schlun, p. 231.
[108] Hanegraaff, 'Theosophical Imagination', pp. 17–36.

suggestion. A 1784 royal commission of Louis XVI had already concluded that while mesmerism seemed to produce real effects, it did so not through the manipulation of a fluid, but through the manipulation of perception: 'The imagination works wonders; magnetism yields no results'.[109] Shortly before mesmerism arrived in England, researchers had become interested in the difference between the experience of the senses and the often substantially different impressions the mind derives from this sensory information.[110] This research resulted in a shift toward emphasis on the suggestibility and hallucinatory tendencies of the mind, driven by respected mental physiologists including Carpenter, who dedicated much of his research to debunking mesmerism, Spiritualism and related movements on these grounds. Carpenter did not deny the legitimacy of accounts of supernormal experience, but, inspired by Braid's experiments with the trance state, theorised that phenomena like mesmerist healing occurred by '*confident expectation* of cure' via manipulation of occult forces, rather than actual effects of those 'agencies which they profess to wield.'[111]

This emphasis on the fallibility of the mind was intended to weaken occultist claims to supernatural experience, but it was also used to provide justification for supernormal abilities like telepathy and clairvoyance. Wallace combined these ideas on the suggestibility of the mind with traditional mesmerist concepts, proposing that the imagination itself might have a fluidic nature that could enact the effects claimed by mesmerism. If this were the case, sightings of fantastic beings such as werewolves could be explained by those 'who had exceptional power of acting on certain sensitive individuals, and could make them, when so acted upon, believe they saw what the mesmeriser pleased.'[112] James Thomas Knowles, who, along with Tennyson, founded the Metaphysical Society, which was dedicated to intellectual reconnoitre of movements like Spiritualism and mesmerism, proposed that 'the "manifestations" of mesmerists, spiritualists, electro-biologists, and clairvoyants' could be attributed to 'brain-waves'. Knowles, like Bulwer, noted that such a theory liberated the superstition of the past:

> Such exceptionally sensitive and susceptible brains — open to the minutest influences — would be the ghost-seers, the "mediums" of all ages and countries. The wizards and magicians […] the mesmerists and biologizers would be the men who have discovered that their brains can and do (sometimes even without speech) predispose and compel the brains of these sensitive ones.[113]

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[109] Qtd. from Tatar, p. 22.

[110] See Winter, *Mesmerized*, pp. 39–40.

[111] Carpenter, *Principles of Mental Physiology*, p. 386 (original emphasis). Cf. Carpenter, *Mesmerism, Spiritualism*, p. 6.

[112] Wallace, Review of *Primitive Culture*, p. 70.

[113] Knowles, 'Brain-Waves', p. 12.

Robert Hanham Collyer, an early advocate of mesmerism in America, developed a theory of clairvoyance centred on thought-transference, which, excited by the possibilities of the recent invention of the daguerreotype, he called 'psychography'. Collyer's theory was very similar to Bulwer's: In one form of psychography ideas could be 'depicted on a recipient brain' through an application of mesmerist will,[114] in another, '*true clairvoyance*', the recipient was seen to gain knowledge independent of a mediating operator, similar to the visions of ulterior time or place achieved in normal clairvoyance.[115] Both sending and receiving brains relied on physical engagement with 'vital electricity […] the medium of intercourse, the link of communion between mind and matter.'[116] These similarities may be the result of a shared interest in mental physiology and a passion for mesmerism — both men were personally motivated by Elliotson, and both were influenced by Townshend — but Bulwer may also have directly encountered psychography via Dickens, with whom Collyer corresponded.[117]

Whatever their sources, Bulwer's ideas surrounding mental communication are similar to others formulated in the period, all of them clearly influenced by mesmerist concepts. His concept of telepathy thus closely networks with contemporary scientific hypotheses which attempted to explain or substantiate occult experience. We have seen that a vril-based, somnambular telepathy facilitates communication, mind control, and mind-reading in *Coming Race*, but nowhere did Bulwer enfold this science into fiction more than in *Strange Story*. Here Fenwick and his mentor Faber — who also begins the novel as a rigid empiricist — are forced by the mesmerist and magical events which they witness to concede that there is more to physical reality and the potential of the human mind than dreamt of by their materialist philosophy. In addition to the conventional plot arcs of the romance novel, *Strange Story* is structured around Fenwick and Faber's scientific engagement with mesmerist and magical phenomena. Fenwick is twice placed in a trance state, once by Margrave and once by Sir Philip Derval, heir to a long line of secretive esoteric researchers going back to the Elizabethan astrologer and magician, Simon Forman. Derval's trance forces his mind to a level of 'extraordinary cerebral activity' and he experiences the mental travel of Bulwer's mesmeric clairvoyance (I, 238–39). Fenwick reassures himself that 'however extraordinary such effects, they were not incredible — not at variance with our notions of the known laws of nature' (I, 260), but his occult experiences grow stranger and stranger, to the point where he finds himself using Margrave's wand to control the magician's

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[114] Collyer, *Psychography,* p. 31. On Collyer, psychography, and its possible influence on Dickens, Hawthorne, and Bulwer, see Van Schlun, esp. pp. 65–68.

[115] Collyer, p. 32 (original emphasis).

[116] Ibid. p. 31. See Townshend, pp. 256–57.

[117] See Van Schlun, p. 186. Collyer studied under Elliotson and republished Townshend's *Facts in Mesmerism* in America in 1841, appending a 'Report of the Boston Committee on Animal Magnetism, as Exhibited by Dr. Robert H. Collyer'.

mind. Following each experience, however, he is able to formulate a naturalistic explanation, based on some combination of the universal fluid and the power of imagination. He finds that the wand, which he himself uses to enact magical effects, has some 'occult magnetic property' (II, 122) that enables reliable technological usage. While forced to admit that the wand has a real effect, he wonders if this might simply be a power by which 'the imagination can be aroused, inflamed, deluded, so that it shapes the things I have seen' (II, 159).

Fenwick's attempt to rationalise these magico-mesmerist phenomena culminates in the dialogue between Fenwick and Faber that Bulwer included (II, 211–34), against Dickens's wishes, to ensure that the reader understood his scientific purpose beneath the 'demonology' of the climactic scenes. Fenwick and Faber discuss a number of naturalistic explanations for the former's experiences. Ultimately, Faber suggests that the incidents of magic and clairvoyance that Fenwick has encountered at the hands of his nemesis Margrave can be attributed to 'the power of the sorcerer in affecting the imagination of others' (II, 216). As Fenwick concludes, 'You conceive it possible that persons endowed with a rare and peculiar temperament can so operate on the imagination, and, through the imagination, on the senses of others, as to exceed even the powers ascribed to the practitioners of mesmerism and electro-biology, and give a certain foundation of truth to the old tales of magic and witchcraft' (II, 223–23). The materialist in Fenwick is reassured by this explanation. In placing the cause of magic 'in the imagination of the operator, acting on the imagination of those whom it affects', he muses, 'We get back into the legitimate realm of physiology' (II, 217).

In the end these are 'only suppositions' — the novel never insists on one particular explanation for its incidences of magic and mesmeric clairvoyance. As Bulwer told his son, the combination of the Faber dialogues and the supernatural ending did not manage to 'explain the phenomena of marvel — no philosophy yet formed does'.[118] This ambiguity increases the novel's sense of science fictionality, as its aura of sceptical debate and its competing hypotheses reproduce the dialogical aspect of scientific method. However, though the novel does not definitively decide on telepathy as its explanatory mechanism, when this novum is set in the context of similar concepts in Bulwer's other science fiction, as well as evidence from his letters and essays, it is clear that he saw Faber's imagination-centred theory of occult experience as a convincing naturalistic explanation for all that was deemed supernatural.

Bulwer's development of a theory of telepathy from out of his fictional and real-life explorations of mesmerist theory is historically significant in at least three ways. First, his occult science fiction offers a vivid cultural-historical view of the progression from fluidic magical and

[118] Edward Bulwer-Lytton to Robert Bulwer-Lytton, 15 April 1862, in *Life*, II, 347–48.

mesmerist theory to more empirically acceptable — or at least less empirically accessible — theories located in the liminal territory of the mind. Second, though Bulwer did not formulate his theory in isolation, his ideas are early and indicative examples of a significant prehistory of telepathy that the SPR ignored, and which later historians have not sufficiently acknowledged. The theory of telepathy formulated by Frederic Myers and his colleagues, particularly Edmund Gurney and Frank Podmore, was more carefully delineated and articulated than most earlier attempts to explain occult phenomena as the result of the transfer of thoughts and impressions from mind to mind. Conceptually, however, the theory had many occultist and mental physiological precursors.

Myers coined 'telepathy' in 1882, while compiling accounts of paranormal experiences 'recorded by trustworthy witnesses in the last two centuries' with the SPR's Literary Committee. Like Bulwer and Knowles, the Committee hypothesised that many of the phenomena grouped in categories of experience from dream visions to clairvoyance would 'be found to resolve themselves into simple transference of impression'.[119] Luckhurst has detailed the manner in which this broad concept of telepathy took up a central position in the explanatory structures of the SPR, particularly for Myers.[120] Mesmeric and Odylic effects were quickly attributed to telepathy; by 1884 the Literary Committee added spectral phenomena to the list. Myers later went further, suggesting that such impressions could be perceived by 'bystander' minds, as Bulwer had already theorised fictionally in *Haunted*.[121] Reflecting the ambivalence toward fluidic explanations displayed by Puységur, Braid, and Bulwer, Myers expressed attraction to the idea of attributing telepathy to an occult fluid or force, though this was not his ultimate point of interest.[122] In 'The Subliminal Consciousness' (1892) and its expanded and revised follow-up, the posthumously published *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death* (1902), Myers developed an expansive theory to explain nearly all 'supernormal phenomena', which orbited around the central node of telepathy, considered to be 'the Rubicon between the mechanical and the spiritual conceptions of the Universe'.[123] However, while telepathy was Myers's neologism, and while the SPR did, as Myers claimed, seize 'priceless opportunities for experiment' which theorists like Bulwer did not bother with, the SPR did not, as Myers himself admitted, invent the concept.[124] Further, though the SPR saw telepathy as a naturalistic solution to the superstition and supernaturalism of occult experience, Bulwer's magical mesmerism indicates that, among

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[119] 'Report of the Literary Committee', pp. 120, 146.

[120] See Luckhurst, *Invention of Telepathy*, pp. 60–112. Cf. Kripal, *Authors of the Impossible*, pp. 79–80.

[121] Myers, I, 265.

[122] Myers, I, 245. As Luckhurst illustrates, the function of telepathy was frequently attributed to an etheric field in the period (*Invention of Telepathy*, p. 88).

[123] Myers, I, 241.

[124] Gurney and others, pp. xliii–xliv.

many other intellectual sources, the roots of telepathy had purchase in occult soil, a heritage that was maintained even in the later stripped down form of direct mental communication that has largely characterised the trope in science fiction.

'Among my brethren in the masonry of fiction'[125]

It is to science fiction that Bulwer's telepathy made a third historically significant, and quite seminal, contribution. It is an early incarnation of what would become one of science fiction's most lasting tropes.[126] Presentations of thought transmission in *The Coming Race* have, because of that novel's mega-textual influence,[127] played a particularly important role in science fiction's development of telepathy from a contextual swirl of mesmerism, magic, psychical research, and parapsychology. The novums which Bulwer developed from his magical mesmerism also appear to have had other impacts on early SF. David Seed identifies Bulwer's 'spiritualization of electricity' as a fictive act that 'anticipates' Marie Corelli's application of similar concepts in *A Romance of Two Worlds* and *The Life Everlasting*.[128] Indeed, Corelli's science fiction, as we will see in Chapter Four, is frequently generated by an invented occult science she called her 'electric' or 'psychic creed'. This science posits a force of divine electricity, which, much like Bulwer's universal electrical fluid, enables many of the powers and experiences claimed by mesmerists, including telepathy.

Other texts that show a direct intertextual link with *Coming Race* include George Griffith's *Olga Romanoff* (1894), which directly connects the novel's superior 'Aerian' society with the Vril-ya. A prince among the Aerians claims that his people have achieved 'the dream that Lytton dreamt', realising 'what he called the Vril force as a sober, scientific fact' (p. 45). John Mastin's *The Immortal Light* (1907) imagines an inner Earth race who can, like the Vril-ya, manipulate high electricity concentrations in their hollow Earth atmosphere, and another, more evolved race that performs similar feats with tools similar to the staffs of the Vril-ya. An obscure future war text of the early 1890s, *The Vril Staff* by 'X.Y.Z.', opens with prefatory advice to consult Bulwer's novel for information about vril and proceeds in similarly derivative fashion. The hero, Zeno Norman, possesses an unclarified occult ability to wipe out large groups of enemy soldiers. Such phenomena are as poorly conceived and legitimated as the novel is written, but 'X.Y.Z.' manages to convey a confused set of explanations, including Zeno's largely unexplained ability to channel

[125] Bulwer-Lytton, 'Normal Clairvoyance', p. 38.
[126] See pp. 201–04.
[127] On *TCR*'s influence see Seed, Introduction to *The Coming Race*, p. lii.
[128] Ibid. p. xxxvi.

vril with his mind, and a doctor's theory that he is a medium under the control of evil spirits (pp. 8, 111, 135). Attempts to trace Bulwer's influence to later magical and/or mesmerist innovations in science fiction will always be specious and incomplete, but it is clear that he constitutes an important node in the complex network of the science fictional mega-text, particularly during his period of best-selling popularity in the nineteenth century.

Bulwer's *Haunted* and *Strange Story* aroused less intertextual enthusiasm, but his conscious method for combining science with fiction is historically significant for SF as well. Crucially, the motivations behind this generation of an SF mode were those of a serious occultist. The dialogues, citations of major scientific figures, competing hypotheses, and detailed extra-fictional footnotes in these texts create a sense of scientific verisimilitude, regardless of whether the reader is aware of Bulwer's actual belief in the magical and mesmerist concepts which they explore. It is clear that the author is either reproducing the style of scientific reportage in order to engage seriously with debates surrounding mesmerism, occult experience, and the powers of the mind, or that he is purposefully mimicking their flavour. Science fiction emerges from either motivation, but all signs point to the first probability — that Bulwer's presentations of magic and mesmerism in his fiction were infused with a spirit of authentic scientific debate. As he told his son as *Strange Story* was finishing its run in *All the Year Round*, the novel's strange climax and the radical physics of Fenwick and Faber were intended to 'show that a thing is not inexplicable because men can't explain it'.[129]

This injection of seriousness into play created an SF mode, one which Bulwer almost certainly intended, and may have had in mind as an authorial strategy from the earliest point at which he brought mesmerism into his stable of marginal, hypothetical, and esoteric knowledges. Townshend personally sent Bulwer the copy of *Facts in Mesmerism* which seems to have been instrumental in convincing Edward of the value of mesmerism, along with a letter which begged his intellectual patronage for the science. Townshend urged him to consider mesmerism a subject for fiction, as he felt Bulwer to be 'peculiarly calculated to invest the mysteries of Mesmerism with solemnity and grandeur'.[130] Bulwer seems to have taken this encouragement to heart. Beginning with his retraction in the reprinting of *Godolphin*, and culminating with the novum of vril, he mixed 'solemnity' with play to invest mesmerist phenomena with both the sublime wonder and calculating natural philosophy of the nineteenth-century scientific romance. He did this out of a philosophy of authorship which placed himself at the centre of the text, rejecting 'the vulgar notion […] that the character of Authors is belied in their works — their works are, to a

[129] Edward Bulwer-Lytton to Robert Bulwer-Lytton, in *Life*, II, 347–48.

[130] Chauncey Hare Townshend to Edward Bulwer-Lytton, 29 February 1840, Hertfordshire County Record Office, D/EK C611, qtd. in Wolff, p. 235.

diligent inquirer, their clearest and fullest illustration'.[131] Bulwer was particularly focused on the way in which an author's mind could be read through a text, though he noted that no author of genius could be fully encoded on paper. This trust in fiction to communicate his philosophical, scientific, political, and religious ideas underpins Bulwer's exploration of magic and mesmerism in fantastic fiction styled for 'the brains of our time'. Townshend, for one, was impressed with the result. He wrote Lytton while *A Strange Story* was still appearing serially, noting that he first tried to send 'a brain-message by mesmeric post', and was now sending a more conventional letter with a 'debt of gratitude for the great and beautiful story with which you are enriching the world and elevating our literature.'[132]

In some sense we should not be surprised to find Bulwer among the first English-language authors of the nineteenth century to develop a science fictional narrative mode. He was well-known as a master of genre, as indicated in 1857 by the *National Magazine*, which opined that if a stranger to English literature were to read 'the half-hundred works' of Bulwer-Lytton, he would be astonished that 'one country, in one generation' should possess fifty writers 'endowed with powers so strikingly original […] so varied in style and kind'.[133] His free mixing of style and genre resulted in a tendency for innovation in his fiction, from the 'silver-fork' and 'Newgate' sub-genres invented early in his career,[134] to the science fiction he developed later in life. By reading Bulwer's occult fiction as an intertextual whole which reflects decades of authentic occult research and exploration, we have seen how his work evolved an SF mode from out of his mesmerist and magical interests, deploying 'scientific pitter-patter' decades before Wells, but in an effort not to ridicule but to naturalistically substantiate the very 'jiggery-pokery' Wells so influentially dismissed. Like any author of the fantastic, Bulwer found the supernatural and the marvellous productive for the creation of fiction, but it was inevitable that his priorities as an occult researcher, bent on discovering naturalistic causes for the apparently supernatural, would lead him to ludically extend theories like telepathy in order to test the boundaries of the natural and challenge other researchers to do the same.

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[131] Bulwer-Lytton, 'On the Difference between Authors', pp. 23–24. Cf. p. 8.

[132] Chauncey Hare Townshend to Edward Bulwer-Lytton, 26 January 1862, Hertfordshire County Record Office, D/EK C633–35, qtd. in Wolff, p. 307.

[133] Saunders and Marston, p. 371.

[134] Campbell, pp. 130–33.

The modernisation of ancient knowledge

It is unsurprising that theorists like Bulwer and Myers found that telepathy could explain magic, mesmerism, and spirit communication, given that the concept of sharing thought and emotion via a modern techno-mediumship arose from the very same theurgic traditions that it sought to explain. However, while telepathy was as old as the magic and witchcraft for which it provided a mental physiological plausibility, its framing was notably modernised. Accelerated by the science of mesmerism, telepathy was represented as a naturalistic phenomenon that provided explanations for claims to paranormal and esoteric experience stretching back into the earliest depths of human history. This modernisation of ancient knowledge is the first of two areas of intersection between occultism and early science fiction that I would like to discuss in relation to Bulwer's SF and the context of its production and reception. The second of these areas — the perennially proleptic status of knowledges like telepathy — is still very much a central progenitor of occult and science fictional knowledge today. The claim that the future of science lay in ancient wisdom was largely specific to the nineteenth-century context, but it played an important role in defining the way in which both occultism and science fiction continue to update the magical beliefs and experiences of the past for a modern, enframed episteme.

The recasting of divinatory, visionary, and magically sympathetic phenomena in a modern scientific framework, intended, at one and the same time, to expand and elide ancient magical knowledge, was at least as old as Swedenborg's presentation of his visionary heavenly journeys as a spiritual scientific method consistent with 'the best science of his day and age'.[135] This renovation of outdated knowledge was particularly visible in mesmerism, where the early modern natural magic of Paracelsus and van Helmont lay at the very roots of Mesmer's theory of animal magnetism. His opponents were quick to use these connections to invalidate his ideas,[136] a critique that continued as a weapon in the hands of anti-mesmerists like Carpenter, who sarcastically observed that '"occult" agencies' like the animal magnetic fluid had been used from 'the very earliest times' to create 'ideal marvels possessing no foundation whatever in fact'.[137] Mesmerists themselves, however, could also deploy this connection to antiquity in their favour. Yes, they acknowledged, the phenomena of mesmerism were indeed equivalent to the magic and witchcraft of centuries gone by, but this merely indicated that the effects of all three traditions were not the result of delusional fantasies or demonic intervention, but the perfectly natural results of the causal power of the newly discovered trance state. William Gregory, for example,

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[135] Hanegraaff, *Western Esotericism*, pp. 132–34.
[136] See Darnton, p. 14. Tatar, p. 4.
[137] Carpenter, *Mesmerism, Spiritualism*, pp. 1–2.

argued that phenomena once confined to 'priests, adepts, magicians, sorcerers, and perhaps astrologers and physicians' could now 'be referred to natural causes, connected with mesmerism in some of its innumerable developments.'[138]

We have seen that in concepts like psychography, psychometry, normal clairvoyance, brain-waves, and telepathy these mesmerist modernisations experienced further adaptations as later generations attempted to assimilate similar phenomena within different, usually growingly secular and skeptical, scientific contexts. Myers portrayed telepathy not as a *continuance* of prior magical ideas, but as a new scientific discovery that could, at long last, solve the befuddling mystery of a range of occult phenomena reported over the centuries. He noted the long history of mental communication and observed the important experimental history of mesmerism, but felt that 'it is only within the last few years that the vague and floating notion has been developed into definite theory by systematic experiment.'[139] Such a rhetorical strategy is quite understandable given the SPR's goal of embedding the phenomena explained by telepathy into a fully empirical and professional scientific framework, and given the experimental data (later proved fraudulent) which they believed to substantiate thought-transference.[140] As the prehistory of telepathy illustrated in Bulwer's novels shows, however, the SPR's theorisation of telepathy offered little that was new to the commonplace nineteenth-century attempt to cast modern scientific theories and discoveries as naturalistic explanations for a wide range of phenomena once deemed supernatural.[141] As A.H.E. Lee, an occultist and amateur historian of mesmerism observed in 1927 of the lingering potency of mesmerist ideas: 'Terms change — ideas continue — from one age to another.'[142]

The belief that modern science explained mysteries of the past was hardly unique to occultism in the period. Indeed, one could even find leading scientists claiming that the ancients had possessed modern scientific knowledge, as in Nikola Tesla's claim that there was nothing supernatural in Moses's magical acts as he was 'undoubtedly a practical and skillful electrician far in advance of his time'.[143] What was unique about occult science, however, was the claim that modern science was not just a rediscovery of ancient knowledge; it was also a harbinger of its coming return to epistemological pre-eminence. Dedicating his new occultist periodical, the

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[138] Gregory, *Animal Magnetism*, pp. 111–12. Similar arguments were made by Samuel Underhill (p. 11) and Baron Dupotet (*Animal Magnetism*, pp. 222–61). Cf. Kurshan, 'Mind Reading', pp. 22–23.

[139] Myers, pp. 242–43.

[140] See Luckhurst, *Invention of Telepathy*, pp. 69–70.

[141] See pp. 96–97.

[142] Lee, p. 42.

[143] 'The Wonder World to be Created by Electricity', *Manufacturer's Record*, 9 September 1915, pp. 37–38 (p. 37), qtd. in Dobson, p. 126. It should be noted that Tesla's research methods could align more closely to occultism than conventional empirical science. He claimed, for example, to receive some of his visionary ideas from Mars (Dobson, p. 126).

Unknown World, to 'whatever is unachieved in science', late-century esoteric theorist and historian Arthur Edward Waite noted that the journal would be dedicated to subjects like 'white and black magic, necromancy, divination, astrology, alchemy, witchcraft' and a number of other subjects of 'hermetic philosophy'. In a word, said Waite, 'the *Unknown World* will be devoted to the "superstitions" of the past, or, more correctly, to the Science of the future.'[144] Like most occultists, Waite saw this radically expansive epistemology as not just a reconciliation of ancient and modern wisdom, but a harmonisation 'of spiritual and physical science, in other words, of religion and modern thought.'[145] Waite would later discard these views in favour of a more mystical position with little interest in science,[146] but his *Unknown World* editorial reflects the extent to which the appeal to scientific legitimacy aided occultists in synthesising religious priorities with the currents of enframing. This was not, however, accomplished only through a modernisation of religion. Rather, it was science that would ultimately require upgrading, via esoteric knowledge supposedly traceable to Chaldea, Egypt, and Babylon. For Blavatsky, modern science was a derivative borrowing from such ancient wisdom, but limited, in comparison, by secular materialism and theistic dualism. *The Secret Doctrine* sought, in part, to present 'a few more proofs of the fact that more than one F.R.S. is unconsciously approaching the derided Secret Sciences' (I, 633). Golden Dawn founder William Westcott observed the links between chemistry and alchemy, concluding not that chemistry had succeeded alchemy as a more accepted and empirically successful form of knowledge, but that the consanguinity showed that alchemy was actually the future of modern science.[147]

Science fiction displays a tendency toward a similar modernisation of ancient concepts. Tatyana Chernysheva has argued that modern science fiction continues to deploy miraculous and marvellous tropes such as underwater habitation, instantaneous travel, and transmutation of the body. She attributes this insertion of 'old imagery into a new world view' to an 'orientation — not always a conscious one — toward folktale and older fantasy […]. Human thought in each new stage of its development tries to conserve and save what was accumulated in the earlier culture epochs.'[148] This mythical continuity is certainly an important aspect of science fictional tropes and morphemes, not just in terms of archetypes but of ideas. Like occultists and psychical researchers, SF authors have rebranded outdated concepts like magic and clairvoyance to adapt to the particular epistemological climate of a later time. As Chernysheva admits, however, this modernisation of ancient concepts is poorly understood (p. 41). I would thus like to examine the

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[144] Waite, 'In the Beginning', p. 2.
[145] Ibid. p. 3.
[146] See Roukema, pp. 49–54.
[147] See *The Science of Alchymy*.
[148] Chernysheva, p. 41.

intersection between occult epistemology and science fictional narrative style, particularly in the protoplasmic nineteenth-century developmental stages of both, in order to offer some clarity to this vital generative dynamic of the SF mode.

Most SF after the early twentieth century has tended to portray fictional concepts developed out of this dynamic in the same manner as Myers — as magic liberated and justified by technological, secular, or empirical frameworks. In the formative period with which we are currently concerned, however, SF tended toward a self-aware balance of ancient and modern similar to occultism. In Fitz-James O'Brien's *The Diamond Lens* (1858), for example, a young microbiologist named Linley discovers a tiny elemental being beneath his microscope, which he had previously been aware of from the eighteenth-century French Rosicrucian novel, *Le Comte de Gabalis*. This feat is made possible by futuristic optics recommended by none other than Antonie van Leeuwenhoek, the father of microscopy, who communicates with Linley via Spiritualist mediumship. Emma Hardinge Britten's *Ghost Land* deploys the language and discoveries of contemporary electromagnetic research, ether physics, and astronomy, along with mesmerism and Spiritualism, to legitimate a human technology of mediumship practiced by an ancient occult order that, like Bulwer's Chaldean adepts, was founded in ancient Eastern and Near-Eastern centres of esoteric wisdom.

It is unsurprising to find this presentation of ancient magic as future science in a novel written by an occultist like Britten, but a similar idea supports the science fictional innovations in several novels by Marie Corelli. Her approach is most succinctly captured in her last SF novel, *The Secret Power: A Romance of the Time* (1921). Here the occult scientist Morgana discovers a source of perpetual energy of which modern science has been ignorant, but of which, she argues, the ancients had been well aware. 'Nowadays we triumph in our so-called "discoveries" of wireless telegraphy and telephony, light-rays and other marvels — but these powers have always been with us from the beginning of things' (p. 329). Corelli had already expressed similar ideas in *Ardath* (1889), *The Soul of Lilith* (1892),[149] and *A Romance of Two Worlds* (1886), where the heroine is told that human electricity 'is nothing new. It was well known to the ancient Chaldeans. It was known to Moses and his followers; it was practiced in perfection by Christ and his disciples' (p. 162). These fictionalised concepts are reflections of Corelli's actual conviction that ancient magic was little more than the possession of technologies which had been forgotten and were now being rediscovered. Corelli owned J. Davies's English translation of Pierre Vattier's *History of the Pyramids* (1666; trans. 1672), which she described as just one text in a larger collection of rare books on the Egyptian mysteries.[150] In two early-twentieth-century essays, she revealed that

[149] See, e.g., *Ardath*, pp. 280, 357; *SL*, p. 75.
[150] Marie Corelli to Wallis Budge, 8 April 1923, qtd. in Luckhurst, *The Mummy's Curse*, p. 9.

her study of the magical acts of the Egyptian priests had revealed that 'our latest inventions, such as the electric light, the telephone, the phonograph, and many other modern conveniences, were used by the priests for "miraculous" effects. From the Egyptian priesthood we derive the beginnings of scientific discovery'.[151] This conclusion echoed the common occultist interest in the mysteries and strange powers of the Egyptians. The belief in Egyptian techno-scientific superiority was also common. Dr T.J. Betiero, for example, co-founder of the occultist periodical *Star of the Magi*, echoed Corelli in arguing that no one who examined the 'mass of evidence' could deny 'that the Egyptian priests were perfectly familiar with all classes of psychic phenomena, characterized as modern, and that they were also in possession of secrets pertaining to the so called exact sciences, as well as of the occult, of which we to-day have no knowledge or conception.'[152]

Both Britten and Corelli were likely influenced by the synthesis of ancient and modern that generates a science fictional narrative in Bulwer's novels. We have seen that though the phenomena recorded in *Haunted* 'seem wild as the fables of a bewildered monk' (p. 99), they are presented as the result of telepathic communication via physical forces not yet understood by science. *A Strange Story* emulates this synthesis of ancient wisdom and modern science. Fenwick, the 'self-boasting physician, sceptic, philosopher, materialist' finds himself pursuing the rejected knowledge of the esoteric traditions in order to explain his experiences, 'prying into long-neglected corners and dust-holes of memory for what my reason had flung there as worthless rubbish' (II, 36). Even Margrave, the character equivalent, perhaps, of the 'demonological' conclusion of the novel, hopes to create the Philosophers' Stone in order to achieve immortality by combining 'the wisdom of the Neo-platonists, Rosicrucians and Early Modern mystics and magicians with the scientific discoveries of the age' (I, 121). These fictional unions of ancient and modern are a reflection of Bulwer's general epistemological approach. Citing French intellectual Alfred Maury, he argued in an essay that 'the secret of magic is to be sought in physiology', knowledge that, he said, had already been possessed by 'the sages of antiquity, and the illuminati of the middle ages.'[153] In thus tracing the naturalistic sources of magical experience, Bulwer seems to have had mental physiology most in mind. Relaying his opinion to Lady Combermere that Spiritualist phenomena were not caused by human spirits, he felt more comfortable tracing them to 'agencies of communication which no philosophy has yet solved, but which bear out the

[151] Corelli, 'A Question of Faith', p. 52. Cf. Corelli, 'The Vanishing Gift', p. 289.
[152] Betiero, pp. 6–7.
[153] Bulwer-Lytton, 'On Essay-Writing', p. 150. Cf. Wolff, pp. 243–44.

universal and immemorial traditions of mankind, and are analogous to the boasted powers which the philosophical magician of old assumed'.[154]

The collision of ancient and modern knowledge that took place in nineteenth-century scientific culture, particularly on the margins, thus played an important role in developing some of science fiction's most sublime tropes, telepathy foremost among them. It is important to accentuate this fact, as the prevalence of ancient knowledge in early SF has, ironically, often been responsible for particular authors and texts being overlooked or excluded in processes of canonisation and definition. Scholars have disputed Brian Aldiss's identification of *Frankenstein* (1818) as a science fictional ur-text, for example, because, in David Ketterer's formulation, 'science is treated by Mary Shelley in a metaphoric manner that owes more to the occult, superstitious "sciences" that Victor supposedly moves away from, than to any of the modern hard sciences that he apparently pursues.'[155] Victor's animation of his monster is certainly carried out through a combination of magical and alchemical, vitalist and electrical means, but this dichotomous separation of ancient and modern knowledge is precisely the sort of presentist analysis that has failed to understand the heterogeneous nature of nineteenth-century science and the epistemological restitution of the ancient via the modern, both of which resulted in particular science fictional forms to which *Frankenstein* was certainly a seminal contributor.

For nineteenth-century authors like Bulwer, the look to the past was motivated by a very real conviction that the future social, intellectual, and biological evolution of humanity relied upon the application of modern science to ancient knowledge. This dynamic has been reproduced at points since, in the modern Gnosticism of Philip K. Dick, for example — the basis of the paranoiac cosmology that defines novels like *Radio Free Albemuth* (1976; published 1985) and *VALIS* (1981). But the urge to regenerate outdated knowledge forms has not been confined to those who actually believe in them. There may not have been any particular purpose behind Samuel R. Delany's subversion of twentieth-century '"modern science"' via the discovery of 'psychomorphic' elements in *Nova* (1968, p. 31), but the result is an ulterior epistemology that guides the narrative to an awakening of the possibilities of divination and magical idealism. Delany's author-character Katin describes this transition, detailing the fall of 'Einsteinian quantum theory' and its replacement with an understanding of the cosmos that is both newer and older than twentieth-century physics: 'The experiences opened by psychedelics were making everybody doubt everything anyway and it was a hundred and fifty years before the whole mess was put back into some sort of coherent order by those great names in the synthetic and integrative sciences' (p.

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[154] Edward Bulwer-Lytton to Lady Combermere, 3 October 1854, in *Life*, II, pp. 45–47.

[155] Ketterer, *Frankenstein's Creation*, p. 81. For a sum (and contradiction) of these arguments, see Willis, p. 65.

31). With the exclusive materialism of pre-twenty-first-century physics put to bed, it has become as irrational to disbelieve in certain forms of knowledge as it had once seemed rational to reject them. Tarot divination is the primary instance of this possibility explored in the novel, as the 'greater trumps' of this divinatory tool can be used both to divine coming realities and to shape them. Delany's novel thus turns to a retro nineteenth-century model of epistemology, synthesising the material with the psychical, and applying future science to ancient knowledge to prove that the witches were right all along.

Assumptions that science fiction is incompatible with ancient knowledge emerge in part from the tendency to identify the mode as a future-oriented literature of 'imaginary prediction',[156] a genre, in Csicsery-Ronay's conception, built on a radical socio-cultural shift from the backward gaze of the sacred to the future focus of the secular (pp. 80–81). Science fiction has certainly been obsessed with techno-scientific imaginaries and their future ramifications, but at every step it has, like the emblematic space opera *Star Wars*, done so while turning swords into light-sabres; the occult energies of mesmerism and Theosophy into the even less carefully defined 'force' of the Jedi. As the importance of the modernisation of ancient knowledge to the SF mode in its embryonic stages indicates, SF performs a function of cultural memory as much as it imagines society into the future. As such, it encases rejected, outmoded, and marginalised ideas[157] — the very set of knowledges often held to constitute the category of esotericism in modern Western culture. The ability to scry through the crystal of Bulwer's fiction to glimpse the inventive, tumultuous prehistory of telepathy is just one example of the greater awareness of both cultural and genre history that can be gained following a realisation of this important aspect of science fictional narrative.

Fiction and hypothesis

Where SF does tend to be resolutely future-focused, even when adapting or reviving ancient or rejected knowledges, is in its perpetual openness to hypothetical, rather than established, scientific knowledge. This second area of intersection between occultism and SF is perennial to both, but it was particularly salient in the nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century period, wherein it was assumed that scientific discovery and technological advancement would soon result in the revelation of as-yet-unknown aspects of reality — new fluids, new forces, new dimensions. Openness to such discovery was a virtue among many investigators of both the natural and supernatural worlds**.** Faraday, for example, ultimately dismissed the claims of

[156] Csicsery-Ronay, p. 78.
[157] See Luckhurst, 'Pseudoscience', p. 405.

Spiritualism, but not before he had conducted experiments with dancing tables in hopes of discovering a new physical force.[158] The seemingly occult but demonstrably real properties of electricity and magnetism, or the astonishing avenues of communication opened up by the telegraph, had resulted in a widespread willingness to suspend disbelief for the purposes of engendering inquiry that might lead a fortunate researcher to stumble upon further paradigm-shifting knowledge of the workings of the universe. This epistemological environment was crucial to the development of theories like mesmerist healing, clairvoyance, and telepathy. How ludicrous was it, really, to consider the possibility that thought could be conveyed via etheric transfer, when all assumptions regarding the relationship between mind and space had been radically shifted by the telegraph's ability to transfer sound over similar distances?

This favourable environment for speculation grew out of a general relaxation of the rigid inductive method of British empiricism. Originally championed by Francis Bacon, this method limited hypothesis to data derived from experimental and pre-existing data. Inductive empiricism had facilitated over two centuries of scientific progress and provided the root soil for a range of nineteenth-century movements, including scientific naturalism and the Positivism of Auguste Comte. Empiricism's insistence on developing knowledge only from sensible or observable data had always had its challengers — mesmerism chief among them[159] — but, as Levine observes, by the nineteenth-century inductive method 'seemed to be calling all of external reality into question' as its methods revealed a natural world much stranger and more contradictory than it appeared to the once-trusted human senses.[160] Empiricist method, in other words, had created a knowledge from experience that no longer felt consanguineous with the sense-world from which that knowledge had been derived. In this context it seemed to researchers like George Lewes that if 'Truth is the conformity of Inferences with Sensation, all Science must be false.'[161]

Over the course of the century, this problem of empiricist accessibility drove a shift in scientific method back toward the deductive logic of rationalism.[162] Scientists in areas wherein research subjects were difficult to observe, particularly mental physiologists and psychical researchers tasked with mapping the inaccessible terrain of the mind, chafed under the empiricist prioritisation of sensible data. Leading mental physiologist Henry Maudsley argued that pure induction only provided a minute, 'tedious picture' from which 'no one can carry away a true idea of the whole'.[163] Huxley agreed that 'those who refuse to go beyond fact, rarely get as far as fact'

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[158] Moore, p. 27.

[159] See Darnton, pp. 10–16; Winter, *Mesmerized*, p. 6.

[160] Levine, *Realistic Imagination*, pp. 275–76.

[161] Lewes, *Problems of Life and Mind*, I, 319.

[162] On debates over inductive and deductive method in nineteenth-century science, see Levine, *Dying to Know*, p. 20; Jones, p. 220; Kennedy, '"A True Prophet"?' pp. 393–95.

[163] Maudsley, *Physiology of Mind*, p. 295.

— the history of science showed, he argued, that 'every great step [has been made] by the invention of hypotheses, which, though verifiable, often had very little foundation to start with'.[164] Beard went further, arguing that dependence on inductive observation had not just limited the scope of science but had actually encouraged error. Thus, otherwise perfectly trustworthy scientists had been led by observational methods to accept the possibility of 'thought reading' when, Beard argued, a simple application of logic would have prevented this conclusion.[165] The senses, he argued, 'deceive all of us every hour and every moment',[166] and were thus not dependable sources for the acquisition of knowledge. This reformed deductive method created more room for imagination in the scientific process. Tyndall famously argued that 'the power of Imagination' was the key to lighting this 'darkness which surrounds the world of the senses. […] Bounded and conditioned by cooperant Reason, imagination becomes the mightiest instrument of the physical discoverer.'[167]

This shift in the epistemological boundaries of scientific method expanded the terrain on which psychical researchers, occultists, and other explorers of the supernormal could legitimate knowledge claims not easily substantiated via the sensible, observational data of empirical fieldwork or laboratory testing. Though many scientists continued to be cautious about extending what Huxley called 'unverifiable hypotheses' into established knowledge without extensive experimental testing,[168] the increased prominence of deductive method allowed others to seriously entertain intellectually potent and culturally impactful hypotheses surrounding supernormal powers, fluids, and forces. Oliver Lodge found the refusal of scientists to explore numinous research areas like consciousness and mediumship to be the worst kind of scepticism, which 'deters enquiry and forbids inspection. It is too positive concerning the boundaries of knowledge and the line where superstition begins'.[169] Under the aegis of this more open epistemology, Lodge proceeded to apply scientific method to phenomena like mediumship and telepathy.[170]

This renewed appreciation for deduction and imagination supported an epistemological mode as old as human knowledge but now presented as scientific process, a proleptic state of knowledge in which hypothesis vied with fact for paradigmatic status. A period of suspended knowing, in which hypotheses are imagined and theorised, tested, and then either established or rejected, is an established aspect of scientific method, but it could take on both exaggerated and

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[164] Huxley, 'Progress of Science', p. 62.
[165] Beard, 'New Theory of Trance, pp. 24, 42.
[166] Ibid. p. 4.
[167] Tyndall, pp. 129–31.
[168] Huxley, 'Progress of Science', p. 65.
[169] Lodge, p. 17.
[170] Oppenheim, pp. 371–90.

extended proportions in a nineteenth-century context where a respected intellectual like Myers could state that his research was a '*nascent* science […] as each one of [the] great sciences was in its dim and poor beginning, when a few monks groped among the properties of "the noble metals," or a few Chaldean shepherds out-watched the setting stars.'[171] Myers thus purposefully linked his investigations to the alchemical prehistory of chemistry and astrological antecedents to astronomy, approbating such early endeavours on the grounds that they eventually resulted in expanded human knowledge. Apparently unwilling to acknowledge the more negative ramification of his analogy — that both alchemy and astrology had been largely undermined by modern scientific discovery — Myers argued that the next generation would see psychical research as 'the most obvious thing in the world'.[172] This future-directed confidence reflects a common understanding among researchers of the marginal and occult. 'What a few years since was a criterion of madness to believe in, is now the most positive evidence of insanity, to doubt,' said Collyer in 1843, 'The mysteries of one century form the pillars of inductive philosophy in the next.'[173] Nearly a century later the occultist conflation of imaginative hypothesis with sober empiricism was captured by folklorist and occult historian Lewis Spence: 'A generation ago it was the fashion to sneer at the occult sciences. But to-day, men of science in the foremost files of thought have placed them on the dissecting slab as fit subjects for careful examination.' The reason for this change of heart, in Spence's opinion, was the success of sciences like alchemy and mesmerism in paving the way for chemistry and hypnotism respectively. Thanks to occult science, 'gold has been manufactured, if in small quantities, the theory of thought transference is justified, and hypnotism is utilised in ordinary medical practice.'[174]

Scientists like Huxley, Tyndall, and Maudsley would have resisted this attribution of epistemological and methodological value to the occult sciences, but it is clear that in some circles esoteric and marginal knowledge claims were able to gain scientific legitimacy by appealing to a state of perpetually hypothetical knowledge. Luckhurst convincingly argues that science fiction thrives on such 'extraordinary science' wherein 'anomalies challenge the unknown paradigms of normal science and multiple explanations are still, for a time, in circulation.'[175] SF authors have frequently exploited proleptic knowledges such as telepathy and ufology, indicating, as Luckhurst observes, that reductionistic views of SF are based on inaccurate conceptions of a genre that has actually 'reveled in the imaginative potentials of every modern pseudoscientific

[171] Myers, I, 2.
[172] Ibid. I, viii.
[173] Collyer, p. 26.
[174] Spence, p. xi.
[175] Luckhurst, 'Pseudoscience', p. 405.

belief.'[176] Speaking specifically of telepathy, Luckhurst argues that its continuance can be attributed to its strangely perpetual state of prolepticity, the allure of a theory that hovers 'contentiously in the interstice of the natural and human sciences and that impl[ies] major cultural transformation if confirmed.'[177]

Nineteenth-century intellectuals, Bulwer among them, recognised the role played by proleptic knowledge in generating fiction. Carpenter decried phenomena such as clairvoyance as the result of a '"myth-making" tendency [which] builds up the most elaborate constructions of fiction upon the slenderest foundation of fact.'[178] Maudsley acknowledged the imagination as an important source of 'preliminary hypotheses', but also deplored what he saw as a common intellectual tendency to fill 'the voids of knowledge with fictions' rather than undergo the slow, laborious work of empirical science, resulting in a prevalence of 'fictions instead of facts, theories anticipating observation'.[179] Importantly, Maudsley perceived this relationship between anticipatory knowledge and the creation of scientific fictions to be one specific to his own time:

> The forms of imagination's creation naturally correspond with the levels of thought at the time and place, and follow the fashions of its conceptions. As once it peopled the universe with deities and demons more or less in the image of man, and afterwards with the metaphysical entities into which it transformed mental abstractions, so now it exercises its function in the creation of a multitude of theories that forerun and often forestall observation in the different branches of scientific inquiry.[180]

Maudsley thus connected the very same intellectual and creative function responsible for magical and religious myth creation to the proliferation of occultist and other alternative sciences built on what Gillian Beer has called 'the willed, half-consciously fictive and incomplete nature of hypothesis'.[181] For Maudsley, to assert that a scientific theory was valid because it might in future be proven was an act that produced fiction rather than science. Two points should be highlighted here, with important ramifications for this dissertation as a whole. First, Maudsley depicts proleptic science-as-fiction as a historically specific phenomenon, increasing the profile of nineteenth-century epistemology in the mix of cultural and intellectual conditions that developed the SF mode. Second, Maudsley joins Carpenter in viewing hypothesis as the modern, post-Enlightenment space in which the scientific imagination functions, sometimes too

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[176] Ibid. p. 404. For a similar argument specifically related to 'psi' powers, see Stone-Blackburn, p. 249. Roberts discusses SF's attraction to prolepticity in terms of Feyerabend's anarchic scientific research method (*History of Science Fiction*, pp. 7–8).

[177] Luckhurst, 'Pseudoscience', p. 408.

[178] Carpenter, *Mesmerism, Spiritualism*, p. 94.

[179] Maudsley, *Natural Causes and Supernatural Seemings*, p. 116.

[180] Ibid. pp. 117–18.

[181] Beer, p. 4.

enthusiastically. While twentieth-century secular rationalists like Suvin would come to reject narratives evolved from the marginal and occult sciences, their nineteenth-century counterparts seem to have thought the opposite. From their perspective, science fiction (*avant la lettre*) was not just an imaginative thought experiment *derived* from marginal and occult knowledge; it *was already* science fiction from the first instance of its formation in the loose methodologies of deductive reasoning and imaginative projection.

Concerned about the lack of boundaries in this science fictional aspect of knowledge acquisition, scientists like Maudsley and Carpenter rejected it. Bulwer's valuation for the meeting of science and imagination was much more science fictional, reflecting Csiscery-Ronay's observation that, whether acknowledged or not, proleptic imaginative activity sits 'at the heart of scientific praxis', mediating between 'verified theories and the desire for a complete world-picture.'[182] In line with this maxim, Bulwer brought his artistic work together with his philosophical priorities. He identified this synthesis of science and imagination in a letter to his son at the end of his career: 'Science itself, even in its most material form, the mechanical, is not purely inductive — it guesses, it divines a something beyond what is yet known or proveable […] Art or the Poetic invention does this hourly; it is its necessity.'[183] Bulwer saw this joining of artistic imagination with science as particularly prevalent in attempts to empirically substantiate phenomena once considered magical and spiritual. In his introduction to the redacted version of *Haunted* (1864), he observed that the story's 'tales of witchcraft and ghostland' reflected a spectrum of contemporary theories and phenomena that ranged from fraud and superstition to serious scientific research that had 'soberly endeavoured to render such exceptional thaumaturgia of philosophical use, in enlarging our conjectural knowledge of the complex laws of being'. Like Maudsley and Carpenter, Bulwer was unsure of the current value of this knowledge — 'The facts are not sufficiently generalized, and the evidence [has] not been sufficiently tested' — but he saw opportunities both creative and scientific in this prolepticity. As an esoteric researcher he was sure that those who 'would condescend to examine' the occult sciences might 'make an immense progress in our knowledge of the laws of Nature.'[184] As an author of science fiction, this ethic came together with his artistic purposes. For Bulwer, the unknown forces of sciences like mesmerism allowed the 'constructor of imaginative fiction' to present plots and characters, mysteries and terrors, of a type never before seen, while also allowing him to 'wander freely over that range of conjecture which is favourable to his purposes, precisely because science itself has

[182] Csicsery-Ronay, p. 119.

[183] Edward Bulwer-Lytton to Robert Bulwer-Lytton, 3 August 1871, Hertfordshire County Record Office, D/EK C28/34, qtd. in Mitchell, p. 132.

[184] Bulwer-Lytton, 'On the Spirit in which New Theories Should Be Received', p. 141.

not yet disenchanted that debateable realm of its haunted shadows and goblin lights.'[185] Sciences which occupied that uneasy no-man's-land between the bright steel towers of techno-scientific empiricism and the murky fens of pre-Enlightenment superstition, possessed both an enchantment that could be mined for wonder and fantasy, and an indefinable latency that a free thinker like Bulwer could exploit to 'wander freely' through epistemological domains less favourably viewed by the physical sciences.

Mesmerism, and the theory of telepathy which Bulwer developed from it, were key elements of his wandering through the liminal spaces between hypothesis and fact. The Vril-ya display the evolved magico-mesmerist abilities of an imagined 'coming race' of the future; *A Strange Story* represents clairvoyance as a power of suprasensual sight that lies 'dormant and coiled in [the] chrysalis web' of the senses, 'awaiting the wings of future development' (I, 324). These constructions reflect other occultist innovations that rose out of the prolepticity of mesmerism and related, often descendant, occult sciences. We have seen that Lévi theorised the astral light with many of the same preoccupations as Bulwer; Blavatsky proposed a similar 'occult, electric, vital power' called Fohat that was held to unite principles of mind and matter, 'electrifying every atom into life.'[186] Leadbeater was very much thinking within the intellectual context laid down by the theories of these three titans of nineteenth-century occultism when he assessed the phenomena explored by Bulwer in *Haunted*. After attempting to substantiate each seemingly incredible aspect of the story, Leadbeater concludes in his introduction to *Haunted*'s 1911 printing: 'How much of [the story] can really have happened? I reply unhesitatingly that most of it *could*, though we have of course no evidence that any of it ever *did*.'[187]

Leadbeater's hopeful analysis was motivated by the very state of perpetual hypothesis which Bulwer drew upon for his story, and, like other occult scientific concepts that have been born from the pages of Bulwer's fiction, continued to perpetuate that same prolepticity. This dynamic interchange of fiction and hypothesis was instrumental to the development of science fiction. SF's attachment to hypothesis does not require occult theory or the 'pseudoscience' which Luckhurst discusses, but in their corresponding reliance on scientific theories that retain the glamour of their speculative and imaginative origins, esoteric and marginal sciences have always proven uniquely useful to the science fictional imagination. Early SF, produced in a period in which the scientific reputation of imagination and deduction was restored, and in which scientific approaches to the experiences and knowledge claims emerging from the occult revival were at

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[185] Bulwer-Lytton, *Strange Story and the Haunted and the Haunters*, p. 325.
[186] Blavatsky, *Secret Doctrine*, I, 134. Cf. Asprem, 'Parapsychology', pp. 142–44.
[187] Leadbeater, np.

their zenith, was correspondingly reliant on the narrative fertility of hypothesis. John Jacob Astor noted in the preface to his 1894 novel, *A Journey in Other Worlds: A Romance of the Future*, that 'there can be no question that there are many forces and influences in Nature whose existence we as yet little more than suspect' (p. iv). He proceeded from this epistemological starting point to imagine a variety of novums plausible in the scientific context of the period, including spirit communication, geo-engineering on a planetary scale, and apergy, an anti-gravitational force borrowed from Percy Greg but now presented as a newly discovered quasi-spiritual force 'whose existence the ancients suspected, but of which they knew so little' (p. 3). Another example in which this conflation of literary and scientific method is made explicit is Louis Pope Gratacap's *The Certainty of a Future Life in Mars* (1903). Here, extra-terrestrial spirit civilisations and the discovery of intergalactic wireless telegraphy between planets are made possible by scientists 'endowed with speculative tendencies', a 'certain high mindedness', and a 'careless audacity', who thus realise that 'the most extravagant achievements are possible to science' (p. 28).

Conclusion: Bulwer's lasting influence

Bulwer's conscious incorporation of science and fiction thus exemplifies a number of important authorial strategies and tropes, formed in consort with occultism, that would come to define science fiction. Bulwer's SF novels, however, are not simply examples of an ongoing productive collision between science fiction and occultism — they also helped shape this engagement. We have seen that Bulwer was viewed as one of the foremost occultists of the age; similarly, the manner in which he drew from marginal sciences like mesmerism to develop his science fictional rhetorics and central tropes like telepathy had a direct impact, as we have seen, on later authors of SF, including Haggard and Corelli, who were themselves influential in the development of the SF mode.

His depiction of vril and the Vril-ya particularly gripped the public imagination, creating a fervour in some that presaged later SF fandom. In 1891 an event which has been called 'the first ever Sci-Fi convention' took place at the Royal Albert Hall,[188] a costumed fundraiser in which guests attending over a period of five days dressed like the novel's characters and inhabited a space designed to recall the architecture of the Vril-ya city described in Bulwer's text. In 1903 — three decades after the novel's publication — a group dedicated to the discovery of vril established itself in London. The 'Vril-ya Club' met at least six times, attracting attention from a variety of news outlets. Its founder, Arthur Lovell, presented the group as a scientific research

[188] Smith, '5–10 March 1891'.

outfit, its goal to present 'so-called "advanced" ideas in a rational manner, not in the illogical and hysterical fashion to which the public has been too long accustomed.'[189] Its ultimate aims, however, were not so far from hysteria: the *Daily News* reported that Lovell's group sought vril power in order to generate 'a new departure in the history of mankind', and indeed the group's proceedings communicate Lovell's vision of a 'vast international organization' that would supersede Spiritualism, Christian Science, and Theosophy.[190]

The Vril-ya Club is symptomatic of a number of factors which drove the modernisation and popularisation of both science fiction and occultism in the period. First, Lovell seems to have believed that his new occult scientific organisation would somehow be different from its 'illogical and hysterical' predecessors because it was based on vril; this is another illustrative example of the manner in which science fiction participated in occultism's ongoing adaptation of ancient knowledge to make it more compatible with the currents of enframing. This historical flow of influence in the opposite direction — from science fiction into magical practice and metaphysics — continues to be a central, though insufficiently recognised, aspect of SF's wider socio-cultural impact. Further, the club was founded upon the same proleptic premise that substantiated SF and occultism. In vril, it sought a 'force which may be likened to mesmerism, hypnotic power, or personal magnetism, which […] is latent in mankind'.[191] Lastly, the Vril-ya Club is an example of the way in which science fiction, even this early on its development, could provide a hermeneutic with which to encounter and explore the unknown, for occultists and for science fiction writers and readers alike.

[189] Preface to Lovell.
[190] Lovell, pp. 4–7, 10–11.
[191] Ibid. p. 1.

Chapter Three

Naturalists in *Ghost Land*: Spiritualism in the Science Fiction of Emma Hardinge Britten

While there is some ambiguity surrounding the occult engagement of Bulwer-Lytton, there is little doubt about that of Emma Hardinge Britten, a well-known Spiritualist medium, advocate, and historian. Britten involved herself with occultists of varying persuasions, including those with whom she founded the first incarnation of the Theosophical Society in 1875. She travelled and published extensively, sharing a spirito-scientific doctrine which, adopting a term already in use in French Spiritualism, she called 'Spiritism', a synthesis of magic, mesmerism, solar religion, Spiritualism, astronomy, physics, and chemistry. As John Patrick Deveney argues, the varied elements of Spiritism established her as one of the 'originators of modern occultism', while also playing a significant role in influencing Spiritualists to adopt a wider set of occult concepts into their belief systems.[1] This influence took a number of forms, but perhaps none more significant than her self-publication of two books in 1876, *Art Magic: or, Mundane, Sub-Mundane and Super-Mundane Spiritism*, and *Ghost Land: or, Researches into the Mysteries of Occultism*. These texts function collaboratively — *Ghost Land* is presented as an autobiography detailing the magical and Spiritualist experiences of a secretive occult master, while *Art Magic* is a compendium of the knowledge he has gathered through these experiences. The latter book cites passages from *Ghost Land* as experiential evidence for various knowledge claims,[2] while *Ghost Land*, in turn, cites *Art Magic* in order to substantiate theoretical aspects of occult science.

Britten disclaimed authorship of both texts, identifying herself only as 'editor and translator' in service of a pseudonymous occultist she called 'Chevalier Louis de B—— '. The central project of *Ghost Land* and *Art Magic*, however, was parallel to her own: to encourage the conflation of Spiritualism with science and other occult traditions in order to accelerate the spiritual evolution of self and society. An early reviewer noted this consanguinity and saw not the Chevalier but Britten herself reflected in its pages, noting that the characters had been put in place 'to give life to the story' but that they were 'diaphanous to the great enchantress and seer who sits behind them and utters her magnificent rhetoric of spiritual science to the spell-bound reader.'[3] This chapter seeks to elaborate on this statement, though with less hyperbole and with an emphasis

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[1] Deveney, *Paschal Beverly Randolph*, pp. 35–36; Deveney, 'Spiritualism', p. 1079.

[2] Some of these were from early chapters published serially in Britten's periodical, *The Western Star*, in 1872. From April 1892 to March 1893 Britten serialised a sequel to *Ghost Land* in another of her occultist journals, *The Unseen Universe*. It remained unfinished and seems to have attracted little attention.

[3] 'Review of *Ghost Land*', p. 1. The review is anonymous but may have been by Editor Luther Colby.

on how 'the great enchantress' evolved an SF mode, incidentally and unconsciously, out of her efforts to disseminate the tenets of her 'spiritual science' in *Ghost Land*, positioning herself within ongoing scientific and religious debates regarding the reality of spiritual phenomena and occult experience. After a survey of Britten's influential occultist activities, I begin by establishing the fictionality of *Ghost Land* and Britten's authorial role, before exploring the emergence of an SF mode from her fictional expression of the occult scientific concepts central to Spiritism. *Ghost Land*'s strange, always hybrid science fictionality then provides the background for a discussion of two further areas of intersection: the tendency of both occultism and SF to invoke the supernatural while insisting on its naturalism, and the reliance of both movements on scientific discourse more than fact.

This analysis of *Ghost Land* as a central text in a tradition of Spiritualist science fiction sails poorly charted waters. While much research has been done on nineteenth-century Spiritualism in the last forty years, much more remains to be done on the movement's significant influence on popular literary forms in the period. While a number of studies have traced Spiritualism's entanglements with Victorian and modernist fiction, this is usually done, as Christine Ferguson points out, with relation to established literary figures that were positioned on the margins of Spiritualism or, at times, in direct opposition to it.[4] Analysis of Britten's complex authorial strategies in *Ghost Land* provides the reverse: a spotlight on an established figure in Spiritualism whose work is positioned on the margins of literature. As an example of Spiritualism's many entanglements with science fiction, meanwhile, this chapter maps seas even less explored. Spiritualism has received very little attention as a source of science fiction's tropes, stylistics, and narrative assumptions. Stephen Burt observes that 'nineteenth-century American spiritualism can look like SF *avant la lettre*', but does not assess the mega-textual impact of this material, choosing instead to evaluate Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's *The Gates Ajar* (1868), which, as Burt admits, has very little of the science fictional about it.[5] Brian Stableford and Graham Sleight note a number of examples of relevant Spiritualism-infused texts in *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, but conclude, consistent with the suspicion of esotericism common in SF criticism, that 'whether any of this can be considered sf is dubious'.[6]

My argument for *Ghost Land*'s place in the mega-text is intended to open up new cartographic possibilities with which further intersections between Spiritualism and SF can be revealed and assessed. I should note, however, that there are many examples of Spiritualist

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[4] Ferguson, 'Recent Studies in Nineteenth-Century Spiritualism', p. 434. For an excellent survey of Spiritualism's influence on nineteenth-century American fiction, see Kerr, esp. pp. 43–60, 155–222.

[5] Burt, pp. 171–72.

[6] 'Eschatology', np.

fiction more evidently and homogeneously science fictional than *Ghost Land*.[7] My argument that occultism provided fertile intellectual and symbolic ground for early science fiction will not seem more heretical or provocative than it does in this chapter. *Ghost Land* is only secondarily a science fiction novel. Primarily, it is an occult text. Yet, the naturalistic assumptions of many Spiritualists and psychical researchers provided expansive ground for just such an occult science fictional project. Both fictional and non-fictional Spiritualist texts deployed a style of description and persuasion that often seems to have borrowed from — and may even have contributed to — the scientific romances emerging into genre at the time. Though much of the novel is styled with narrative devices intended to astound and entertain, *Ghost Land* has all the pretensions of a scientific treatise: to persuade and convince, even to convert. As with most early SF, it affects scientific discourse, epistemology, and methodology, harmonising spiritual and supernatural elements with enframing in order to uphold its unacknowledged demands, but all the while pushing at its uncertain boundaries. Like other occult movements, Spiritualism sought only to widen the frame of scientific exploration, not undermine it. *Ghost Land* accomplishes this project by exploiting a burgeoning generic mode that sought precisely the same goal.

This case study of Britten and her science fiction also faces navigational challenges in the murky biography of its subject. Much of what we know, especially of Britten's years outside the public eye, is compiled from her own autobiographical work, which, as we will see, has a creatively productive but unreliable relationship with her fiction. Biographers have attempted to sweep away some of this obscurity,[8] but have found themselves frustrated by the absence of resources and materials documenting Britten's early years, which began in Bethnal Green, London in 1823 and seem to have featured a good deal of acting, singing, and piano performance in Paris, London, and New York.[9] Britten's later life is an easier study because of information provided in her *Autobiography* (1900), but even this source skips over significant events such as her marriage to William Britten — her lifetime partner in publishing and occult Spiritualist advocacy — their time in Boston as mesmerist physicians in the early 1870s, and their important role in co-founding the Theosophical Society. It stops decades before William's death in 1894 and her own passing in 1899. The volume seems to have been intended as a series of stories that

[7] I discuss a number of these in Chapter Five. See pp. 192–94.

[8] For biography of Britten, see Dingwall, 'Introduction'; Mathiesen, *Unseen Worlds of Emma Hardinge Britten*; Mathiesen, 'Britten, Emma Hardinge'; Godwin, *Theosophical Enlightenment*, pp. 200–03, 211–12; Demarest, 'Revising Mathiesen'.

[9] Britten, *Autobiography*, p. 3. Cf. Mathiesen, *Unseen Worlds of Emma Hardinge Britten*, pp. 3, 11; Godwin, *Theosophical Enlightenment*, p. 202.

would situate Britten as an impactful founding figure in Spiritualism, as it largely focuses on her career as a trance medium and advocate of the movement.[10]

Britten had good reason to focus more precisely on this context as she was a prominent and respected voice in Spiritualism. She began to build this credibility early on. Soon after renowned medium Mrs. Ada Foye (née Hoyt), convinced Britten of the reality of Spiritualist mediumship by channelling the spirit of a brother who had been lost at sea,[11] Emma began work as a 'test' medium, along with the Fox sisters, at the Society for the Diffusion of Spiritual Knowledge in New York, founded by a group of high status advocates for the new science, including Senator Nathaniel P. Tallmadge, General Edward F. Bullard, and Judge John W. Edmonds.[12] This method of propagation was not enough, however, for the spirits, who, Britten tells us, pressured her to become a travelling trance medium so that evidence of the new scientific religion could be better spread across the globe. She resisted this pressure until the spirits sent Ben Franklin to her, via the mediumship of her friend and landlady Mrs. E.J. French, to compel her to become 'the teacher of a *new* religion'.[13] Britten fulfilled this calling throughout the 1850s and 1860s, also using her platform to speak out for social reform issues, such as the abolition of slavery and institution of aboriginal rights, and even to campaign on behalf of Lincoln in his 1864 re-election campaign.[14] In 1865 she brought her trance skills to England, apparently causing quite a stir in Spiritualist circles.[15] During her five-year stay in Britain, Britten began her transition from the pulpit to the page, publishing influential, and still informative catalogues of Spiritualist events, most notably in *Modern American Spiritualism* (1869) and *Nineteenth Century Miracles* (1884). Her articles and letters appeared frequently in leading occult periodicals, including *Light*, the *Banner of Light*, and the *Spiritual Scientist*. She also founded three journals of her own: *The Western Star* (1872) and *The Unseen Universe* (1892–93) were relatively short-lived, but *The Two Worlds* (1888–), 'A Journal Devoted to Spiritualism, Occult Science, Ethics, Religion and Reform', still survives today, though Britten resigned as editor in 1892.[16]

Britten was not only a Spiritualist, however. *The Two Worlds* tagline displays the ambitious utopian goals Britten hoped to accomplish through her mediumship and authorship. Insisting on

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[10] The volume is actually quasi-autobiographical, as further work was done from Britten's journals after her death by her sister, Margaret Wilkinson, and her Spiritualist contemporary, J.J. Morse. See Morse's preface to Britten's *Autobiography*, p. viii. Cf. Mathiesen, *Unseen Worlds of Emma Hardinge Britten*, p. 20.

[11] Britten, *Autobiography*, pp. 20–25. Cf. Mathiesen, *Unseen Worlds of Emma Hardinge Britten*, p. 13.

[12] Britten, *Autobiography*, pp. 49, 53. Cf. Mathiesen, *Unseen Worlds of Emma Hardinge Britten*, pp. 14–15.

[13] Britten*, Autobiography*, p. 46.

[14] Mathiesen, *Unseen Worlds of Emma Hardinge Britten*, p. 16; Godwin, *Theosophical Enlightenment*, pp. 202, 205.

[15] Britten, *Autobiography*, pp. 212–13.

[16] See Mathiesen, *Unseen Worlds of Emma Hardinge Britten*, p. 20; Oppenheim, pp. 46–47.

a universal, empirically verifiable set of etheric, psychical, and spirit-based causes for all phenomena, Britten hoped to perpetuate the evolution of human society through scientific advances in magical praxis, cosmology, and mediumship abilities including clairvoyance and spirit communication. This goal, and Britten's science of Spiritism, reflected a marriage of Spiritualism with occult magic. Indeed, though she was more active in the Spiritualist community than elsewhere, Britten networked with several other important branches of nineteenth-century occultism. Though she was enthusiastic about Spiritualism, she suspected that a range of occult forces and spirit beings were behind its phenomena, in addition to human spirits. She did not see Spiritualist phenomena as separate from those claimed for centuries by esoteric traditions, or claimed by other occultists in her own time, but as their crowning achievement.[17] She held 'Spirit Mediums' and 'Magicians' to be synonymous,[18] and, as Marc Demarest observes, turned to occult science to legitimate spirit communication,[19] particularly the etheric universal fluid espoused by occultists from Bulwer to Blavatsky. The latter's concept of Fohat as a mediator between spirit and matter may, indeed, have been influenced by Britten's idea of 'force', an 'all-pervading motor of being, "divine fire, astral light, electricity, magnetism, or life"'.[20]

Indeed, though some have disputed Britten's desire to harmonise Spiritualism with other occult currents,[21] this is clearly the central motivation of *Ghost Land* and *Art Magic*. Moreover, the picture she drew of her own life becomes oddly disjointed if we deny this urge to synthesis. We saw in the previous chapter that Britten claimed to have been used as a medium in magical experiments by an 'Orphic Society' which she said included among its members a number of English esoteric luminaries, including Bulwer-Lytton and Richard James Morrison, more famously known as 'Zadkiel', a scryer and astrologer.[22] She also stated that she had kept in communication with members of this group via 'mental telegraph'.[23] It is difficult, even for the most credulous, to ascertain whether these experiences actually occurred, or indeed whether the Society really existed — Britten did not make the claim until 1887, 11 years after she had already written a

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[17] See, e.g., Britten, 'Ancient Magic', p. 268, where Britten argues that Spiritualist mediumship and trance communication are a continuation of abilities and experiences claimed by magicians and witches from the Biblical prophets to the Templars. Cf. Mathiesen, *Unseen Worlds of Emma Hardinge Britten*, p. 2.

[18] Britten, *Autobiography*, p. 2.

[19] Demarest, 'Introduction to the Annotated Edition', p. xviii.

[20] Britten, *Art Magic*, p. 424.

[21] Jocelyn Godwin argues that much of Britten's work, particularly *Art Magic* and *Ghost Land*, is dedicated to developing a distinction between Spiritualism and occultism (*Theosophical Enlightenment*, p. 206), while, for T. Allen Greenfield, Britten was 'primarily influenced by magick rather than mediumship' (np). Mathiesen and Demarest take more harmonising positions. See Mathiesen, *Unseen Worlds of Emma Hardinge Britten*, p. 2; Demarest, 'Introduction to the Annotated Edition', p. iv.

[22] Britten [as 'Sirius'], 'Occultism Defined', pp. 3–5; Britten, *Autobiography*, p. 4. Mathiesen and Godwin see this as quite plausible (Mathiesen, *Unseen Worlds of Emma Hardinge Britten*, pp. 12, 26; Godwin, *Theosophical Enlightenment*, p. 211).

[23] Britten, *Autobiography*, p. 110.

similar experience into *Ghost Land*. Even if her experiences with the 'Orphic Society' are a writing of fiction into life, however, the most important consideration for our current purposes, and for the historical development of Anglo-American occultism, is that Emma stated that she was involved with these esoteric luminaries and thus plugged herself into the burgeoning British occult milieu. There is more solid evidence, moreover, of other occultist affiliation. Britten had some sort of relationship with Frederick Hockley, best known for his crystal scrying expertise. Richard Mathiesen details the discovery by Arthur Machen of a first edition copy of *Ghost Land* in Hockley's library, 'with a letter from the authoress' included,[24] and John Hamill has discovered that Hockley lent Emma some of his magical mirrors for scrying purposes.[25] Though Paschal Beverly Randolph was initially similar to Britten in that he worked as a Spiritualist medium while pursuing more syncretic and heterodox occult pursuits, he eventually left the movement altogether. Deveney argues that Britten probably knew Randolph personally,[26] and she definitely read his occult Rosicrucian texts closely as they, along with the work of Hargrave Jennings, are frequently incorporated (usually uncited) into *Art Magic*.

Britten is thus one of the most indicative examples of the blurred lines between esoteric traditions, concepts, and communities that have prompted me to treat Spiritualism as one of a wider group of occult movements, rather than distancing the movement as some actors in the period, and indeed some historians, have done. Spiritualists sought to distinguish themselves from the range of magical, mesmerist, Rosicrucian, Freemasonic, and Theosophical movements with which they shared many priorities and ontologies. This distinction is not entirely without merit. Leading occultists like Eliphas Lévi expressed 'absolute unbelief' in the possibility of communication with human spirits, while simultaneously attempting to make magical contact with angelic intelligences and elementary beings.[27] Anglo-American Spiritualists (including Britten) also tended to reject reincarnation, which was more enthusiastically embraced in the wider occult community, particularly in Theosophy. Some Spiritualists were also careful to represent themselves not as magical practitioners — or even as people of a religious or supernatural bent — but as scientists, merely interested in establishing the natural laws of the world beyond the grave, and of communication with it. This usually entailed a rejection of occultism quite similar to that found in science fiction criticism, where scientific exploration of the supernatural could be secularly sanitised by establishing occultism as a rejected other. In

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[24] Machen, p. 4. Note that by his use of the term 'authoress', Machen implicitly assumes that Britten was the central figure behind *Ghost Land*.

[25] Mathiesen, *Unseen Worlds of Emma Hardinge Britten*, p. 24.

[26] Godwin, *Theosophical Enlightenment*, p. 250; Deveney, *Paschal Beverly Randolph*, pp. 35, 103.

[27] Eliphas Lévi to Kenneth Mackenzie, personal interview, 1861, qtd. in Godwin, *Theosophical Enlightenment*, p. 216.

observing these differences, scholars have profiled Spiritualism and occultism as distinct traditions, emphasising Spiritualism's exoteric nature over occultism's 'secretive and obscurantist' approach,[28] or Spiritualism as concerned with the passivity of mediumship rather than the active exertion of will in occult magic.[29] However, while these binaries do more or less reflect the realities of the two movements at mid-century, these distinctions quickly began to erode. The exoteric/esoteric dichotomy dissolved as any occult knowledge that *had* been kept secret became more accessible via periodicals and publications like *Art Magic*, while at the same time Spiritualists began to become more interested in synthesizing 'the leading thoughts of occultism'.[30]

From its origins, Spiritualism shared many of these leading thoughts, including a distaste for the dogma perceived to taint organised religions, and an interest in socially progressive causes including feminism, socialism, and free love. Most importantly for our consideration of Spiritualism's potential contribution to science fiction, the movement was like other occultist currents in that it profiled itself as a spiritual science, turning to a similar set of discursive and methodological strategies, and seeking to share the persuasive platforms of mental physiology and physics. This appeal to science was likely motivated by Spiritualism's roots in mesmerism, acknowledge by many of its followers, including Britten herself.[31] Charles Maurice Davies, a Spiritualist and early sociologist of religion, could still say in 1875 that 'most people arrive at spiritualism via mesmerism'.[32] This social connection to the wider network of occultism is further emphasised by the fact that many occultists who ended up associated with other traditions, including Blavatsky, Olcott, Waite, and William Butler Yeats (a leading Golden Dawn adept), started off with Spiritualism.[33] Spiritualism certainly has its own history and unique set of agents and characteristics, but ultimately it was, from the beginning, closely linked to other occult movements and ideas. It is thus essential to include Spiritualist voices in this cultural history of early science fiction's engagement with occultism.

Because *Ghost Land* displays the expansive occult interests of its author, while still dialoguing extensively with Spiritualism, it is particularly useful for this purpose. Esotericism scholars have shown that the novel, along with *Art Magic* and her Spiritualism histories, established Britten as a

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[28] Dodds, p. 97. Cf. Oppenheim, p. 159; Gutierrez, pp. 6–7.

[29] Godwin, *Theosophical Enlightenment*, p. 292.

[30] Deveney, 'Spiritualism', p. 1079.

[31] See Britten, *Nineteenth Century Miracles*. On Spiritualism's emergence from mesmerism and the shared religious and scientific priorities of both movements see Oppenheim, pp. 217–23; Gutierrez, pp. 7, 50–52; Godwin, *Theosophical Enlightenment*, pp. 187–88; Moore, pp. 10–12; Taves, pp. 167–68.

[32] Davies, p. 308.

[33] Moore, p. 6; Waite, *Shadows*, p. 62.

'founding force of Victorian occultism'.[34] John Patrick Deveney argues that she acted as a major influence in Spiritualism's transition from a movement centred around communication with the dead to a tradition that, by the *fin de siècle*, was more concerned with the central preoccupations of occultism that define *Ghost Land* — the evolution of the spirit, magical practice, and hierarchies of being.[35] Both *Ghost Land* and *Art Magic* also seem to have been influential in determining the occult theories and goals of the early Theosophical Society. Both books would have been well along in development when the Society was formed in the autumn of 1875 by a group who had gathered to hear a reading by Egyptologist George Felt. Britten reports that while attending this meeting she was so struck by the consanguinity between the ideas encapsulated in *Art Magic* and those of other attendees like Felt and Blavatsky that she 'urged forward the formation of the Theosophical Society'.[36] As the society met throughout the rest of 1875 and 1876, members were likely to have read the Chevalier's works. Lavoie believes that *Art Magic*, which is directly quoted by Blavatsky in *Isis Unveiled*, provided 'rudimentary doctrines' for her later work.[37] Godwin argues that *Ghost Land* itself affected later developments in the Theosophical Society as it turned from Western esoteric knowledge to Eastern, particularly Indian phenomena.[38]

Ghost Land thus seems to have been a part of Britten's important influence on a number of occult currents. Britten herself saw the novel, along with *Art Magic*, as a major catalyst in the occult revival, as she felt that these texts enabled 'open discussion' of occult lore once 'open only to the antiquarian, historian, or orientalist'.[39] Spiritualist author and reformer W.J. Colville listed the novel, along with *Art Magic* and *Isis Unveiled*, as sources that 'have familiarized the reading public with some of the mysteries of Occult Science and Brotherhoods.'[40] *Ghost Land* still seems to have held a central position as a source of occult knowledge and inspiration in the 1920s, when it can be found advertised among a collection of some of the most influential occult texts of the last centuries, including Swedenborg's *Arcana Coelestia* (1749–1756), issues of Aleister Crowley's periodical, *The Equinox*, A.E. Waite's *Studies in Mysticism* (1906), and Gurney, Myers, and Podmore's *Phantasms of the Living* (1886).[41] Though, unlike the novels of Bulwer-Lytton, *Ghost Land* would not go on to play a direct intertextual role in the development of science fiction, it did

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[34] Lavoie, *A Search for Meaning*, p. 35. Cf. Mathiesen, *Unseen Worlds of Emma Hardinge Britten*, pp. 45–46.

[35] Deveney, 'Spiritualism', p. 1079.

[36] Britten, *Nineteenth Century Miracles*, p. 441. On Britten's role in founding the TS see Godwin, *Theosophical Enlightenment*, p. 302; Mathiesen, *Unseen Worlds of Emma Hardinge Britten*, pp. 19, 33–35.

[37] Lavoie, *Theosophical Society*, p. 298. For Blavatsky's citation see *Isis Unveiled*, I, xxvii.

[38] Godwin, *Theosophical Enlightenment*, p. 302.

[39] Britten [as 'Sirius'], 'Theosophy, Occultism, and Spiritualism', p. 198.

[40] Colville, *Inspirational Lectures*, p. 62.

[41] *Occult Review*, May 1924, p. xi.

exert significant influence on the occult imagination in the period, and thus very likely contributed to the development of both occultism and SF in doing so.

'The science which treats of spirits'

The central goal of *Ghost Land* is to prove the reality of phenomena claimed by magicians and mediums by sharing the occult experiences of a man who is both. To her deathbed Britten maintained her insistence that the text is an autobiographical account by the Chevalier Louis de B——, a powerful clairvoyant adept involved with several secretive initiatory societies.[42] Particular aspects of his account are supplemented by diary entries attributed to the Chevalier's friend, John Cavendish Dudley. This diary is used to diversify the novel's epistolary approach, narrating a sequence of events during which Louis himself is incapacitated by grief and unconsciousness. *Ghost Land* opens with both an introduction from Britten and a preface from the Chevalier, explaining Emma's role as editor and translator and establishing 'Dudley' and 'the Chevalier' as pseudonyms designed to mask the authors' identities at their request.[43] Both are very intent on asserting the 'strict veracity' of the tale that follows (p. 5). If we are to believe Britten herself, then, she deserves little credit for this text.

It is clear, however, that she did much more than simply edit and translate *Ghost Land*. Several scholars have shown through textual analysis that the author is not a German speaker but an Anglophone, thereby removing any need for Britten to translate.[44] Emma's presentation of her author is thus already a fictionalising act — which in itself grants her an authorial role — but this is only the first of many indications of her authorship. A number of life experiences related in her *Autobiography* correspond to those she attributes to Louis. Both are involved as mediums with the Orphic Society, both are convinced of the reality of spirit communication and spend their lives traveling the world to collect further evidence.[45] In *Art Magic*, the Chevalier proposes the founding of a 'school of prophets' to create 'a class of duly qualified Magnetic Physicians, Prophets, Mediums, Clear Seers, and Spiritualistic persons' (pp. 455–57). At her death, an endowment in Britten's will created just such an institution.[46] Britten may have purposefully left a clue as to her authorship in the smokiest of these guns. In the novel's original frontispiece her name appears in large bold type, attributed as editor and translator, but not

[42] See, e.g., 'To the Editor of the Banner of Light,' p. 3, where Britten virulently insists that she is not, as *The Banner of Light*'s reviewer has claimed, the author of *Ghost Land*.

[43] *GL*, pp. 5, 9, 10.

[44] Decker and Dummett, p. 40; Demarest, 'Revising Mathiesen', p. 7n5.

[45] See, e.g., *GL*, p. 400–02, where Britten's history of Spiritualism provides much of the grist for Louis's encounter with the 'Color Doctor' of St Louis, who heals by manipulating objects of different colours.

[46] Mathiesen, *Unseen Worlds of Emma Hardinge Britten*, p. 37.

even a pseudonym is supplied for the author. Instead, in smaller type, *Ghost Land* is attributed to 'the author of *Art Magic*.' Flipping to this earlier text we find only a statement that the volume has been 'published by the author'. Who was the publisher of *Art Magic*? None other than Emma Hardinge Britten, in consort with her husband William.[47]

An equally convincing case for Britten's authorship is that no other contemporaneous figure embodied a personal philosophy so synonymous with that expressed through the fiction of *Ghost Land.* The novel overwhelmingly reflects Britten's longstanding interest in conflating Spiritualism with a wide gamut of occult concepts and practices. Dudley's 'diary' entries also reflect Britten as Spiritualism advocate — one entry discusses details of the Spiritualist craze in America in a continuous twenty-eight-page narrative — and as author of fiction, as Dudley includes long flashback passages explaining his relationships with other characters, helpful for the reader but hardly necessary for an actual diarist. The conventional epistolary style of these diary entries reinforces the quite safe assumption that *Ghost Land* is not an autobiography but a novel with intriguingly complex layers of authorial legitimation.

Britten's reasons for obscuring authorship are unclear. She may have sought the legitimation of masculinity in a male-dominated publishing world, though her decision to produce other works under her own name makes this unlikely.[48] She may also have hoped to avoid negative reactions from Spiritualists to whom her project of expanding the movement's occult range was anathema. Indeed, even *The Banner of Light*, generally favourable to Britten and a frequent publisher of her work, denounced her advocacy of occultism in *Ghost Land*, viewing it as akin to adding the 'darkness […] airy speculation and agonizing dreams' of the occult to the 'light' of 'fact and demonstration' brought by Spiritualism.[49] Who could blame the Chevalier for wanting to remain anonymous, wrote one fan of *Art Magic* to *The Banner of Light* months earlier, indicating that criticism of the book's occult Spiritualism had indeed been marked: 'If a person as universally loved and respected by the Spiritualists as Mrs. Britten was supposed to be, has been so unfairly assailed, what might an obscure person, a stranger, expect at their hands?'[50]

A third, almost certain possibility, is that Britten saw the Chevalier as a voice that could add more credibility to the novel's events and knowledge claims. The Chevalier is male, a member of

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[47] William is thus another candidate for the authorship of *Ghost Land*. However, it is significant that when the pair wished to publish a manuscript on electric medicine, which they practiced professionally during their time in Boston in the 1870s, it was Emma who wrote and published *The Electric Physician; or, Self-Cure through Electricity* (1875), despite William's professional training as a medical doctor. See Britten, *Autobiography*, p. 224.

[48] On the potential attraction of pseudonyms for Britten as an occultist and female author, see Wallraven, esp. p. 93.

[49] 'Review of *Ghost Land*', p. 1.

[50] E.A. Palmer, *Banner of Light*, 29 January 1876, p. 1.

the nobility, and a skilled, experienced, high-ranking occultist. His authority underlies *Ghost Land*'s attempt to persuade readers of the reality of the various magical, psychical, and spirit-caused phenomena he encounters. To the eyes of skeptical modern readers there will be little doubt that *Ghost Land* is no more an autobiography than is *Gulliver's Travels*, but generations of other readers have received the novel as a true account of encounters with the spirit world,[51] indicating the skill and ingenuity with which Britten marries the plausible and implausible in the writing and subsequent marketing of *Ghost Land*. The establishment of the Chevalier as a source of occult scientific expertise lends credence to the novel's conceptual and technological claims, helping to perpetuate a science fictional mode.

The fictionalisation of Louis de B—— is thus part of Britten's creation of a constructive tension between realist perspective and fabulation in the novel. The scope of the phenomena which *Ghost Land* portrays as empirically verisimilar is strikingly indicative of the expansive epistemology of occultism. The novel explores the length and breadth of the 'complete cosmic scheme' that is revealed to the Chevalier in a vision:

> World building and builders, constitution of the solar universe. Of gods, men, spirits, angels, the fall, growth, and reconstruction of the spirit. The realm and destiny of souls. Light, heat, physical, astral, and spiritual light. The human soul, its powers, possibilities, forces, and destiny. Will; occult and magical powers, forces, and objects. The relation and influence of planetary bodies upon each other; the human mind, the necessity of theological myths. The permanence of being, cycles of time, cyclones of storm and sunshine in human life. (p. 357)

The Chevalier hopes that knowledge of these phenomena will provide the basis for 'a new, true, and religious science and scientific religion' (p. 357). The novel details his exploration of these diverse subjects, insisting on the empirical value of his experiences and discoveries.

This occult experimentation begins at twelve when a leading German occultist named Felix von Marx takes an interest in Louis and uses mesmerist techniques to unlock his enormous potential for mediumship. The Chevalier becomes a research tool in the occult scientific experiments of a secret society called the 'Berlin Brotherhood', which deploys the Chevalier's sudden proficient abilities in astral travel and clairvoyance. After a move to England, Louis continues these experiments with von Marx and the mysterious Orphic Society (here called the 'Orphic Circle'). Von Marx dies in the midst of experimenting with the formation of a 'dual soul' combined of his and Louis's essences. His death establishes this soul-link, increasing Louis's

[51] See Britten's claims to this effect, *GL*, pp. 12, 14, 18. Cf. Palmer, p. 1. Other occultists of the period, including Olcott and A.J. Davis, assumed that Britten herself wrote both texts. See Demarest, 'Introduction to the Annotated Edition', pp. xxxix–xl.

power, but he is distraught at von Marx's loss and flees from his grief to India. There he meets yet more occult scientific researchers, both Indian fakirs and a global brotherhood of initiates housed in the caves of Ellora. He trains and researches further in occult science with these adepts. Whatever the occult circle or experience, Louis's accounts are dotted with didactic asides on mesmerism, clairvoyance, and the cosmology of the combined physical, spiritual, and astral nature of the universe. At times the Chevalier leaves aside his narrative for full chapters to expound on Spiritism — 'the science which treats of spirits' (p. 314).

Britten's particular brand of occult scientific spirit research was rooted in wider attempts to discover natural, empirically sustainable causes for abilities claimed by mediums and the phenomena they produced. The burgeoning fields of Spiritualist science and psychical research posited that the world of the dead was a different, separate realm, but not a supernal, ineffable heaven. The weight of evidence and observation was too heavy, for scientists like Lodge, Crookes, Wallace, and Myers, to deny the probability of the existence of this realm, with laws that could be empirically established. Its inhabitants had clearly figured out how to communicate with the physical world, inhabit the particularly sensitive minds of mediums, manipulate and propel objects, and even manifest back into quasi-physical form.[52] Psychical research was rarely so dispassionate and objective, however. It remained closely networked with Spiritualism and other occult currents, which shared a belief in alternative realms of spiritual or etheric matter. Many leading psychical researchers were Spiritualists themselves, including Crookes, who experienced the tragic death of a family member shortly before taking up his Spiritualist research.[53] Moreover, the very urge to scientifically investigate, and possibly substantiate, phenomena from spirit communication to clairvoyance was heavily influenced by the empirical instinct that had been present in the movement from its earliest days, when Isaac Post investigated the claims of the Fox sisters. Psychical research was largely a 'marginal science' even in the period; its theories never proceeded into paradigm and its research subjects continually evaded empirical provability.[54] Yet, the attention paid to clairvoyance and spirit mediumship by leading figures in the scientific establishment shows its proleptic viability in the period, a viability that spilled over into Spiritualism.

Thus, though Britten was not personally networked to scientific research communities in any significant way, her fiction is rooted in the wider context of scientific evaluation of spirit phenomena. It also continues to reflect her own participation in experimental approaches to

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[52] On Spiritualism's complex relationship with scientific discourses, organisations, and leading establishment figures, see Oppenheim, pp. 3–4, 120, 199–203; Noakes, 'Spiritualism, Science and the Supernatural', pp. 23–25.

[53] Noakes, 'Spiritualism, Science and the Supernatural', p. 33.

[54] McCorristine, 'General Introduction', p. xviii. Cf. Luckhurst, *Invention of Telepathy*, p. 1.

mediumship, whether as a test medium at the Society for the Diffusion of Spiritual Knowledge, or as an advocate of Spiritism. Britten shared the belief of psychical researchers that open-minded epistemology and experiment would soon reveal new forces, realms, and entities that would make mundane the magical appearance of mediumship. Indeed, she went much further into imagination than the more empirically grounded efforts of a Lodge or Crookes. For Britten, scientific and technological approaches to occult abilities would transform the future of humanity. 'Endeavouring scientifically' to improve spirit communication, while also improving magical ability via 'knowledge of magnetic, psychologic, and physiological laws', would radically enhance human knowledge and wellbeing, in a manner more determinedly materialistic positivists could only dream of.[55] The only obstacle remaining between humankind and knowledge of 'infinite things and eternal principles' was ignorance, a stumbling block that could easily be overcome by 'Spiritual chemistry': the 'patient and unremitting study' of the laws of spirit.[56] Like many other occultists and psychical researchers, Britten believed that scientific study of spirit-based phenomena would harmonise the artificial binaries of religion and science. 'The whole range of spiritual phenomena*,'* she wrote in *Modern American Spiritualism*, 'Point (sic) conclusively to the truths of spiritual doctrines; placing religion no longer on the foundations of fleeting human opinion, human assertion, or theory, but on the enduring basis of scientific facts' (p. 520). In this vein, part of the stated intention for the Chevalier's texts was to contribute to occult efforts to 'reduce spiritual existence and human life to correspondential and appreciable doctrines of science.'[57]

The technologies of mediumship: clairvoyance and scientific verisimilitude

In *Ghost Land*, 'Louis de B—— ' seeks to achieve this goal through several strategies commonly used by occultists to enhance the legitimacy of concepts and practices that ranged from marginally scientific to outright rejected in non-occult spheres. Each of these strategies was emulated in early science fiction, and each thus constitutes an area of intersection between SF and occultism. In Britten's novel, these include evidence based on personal, occult experience, and the enhancement of knowledge claims via social status and authority, two areas which I will discuss in the next chapter, with Britten's Chevalier as one of several examples of each. To conclude this chapter, I will assess two more areas of intersection: an expansive naturalisation of the supernatural, and a tendency to appeal more to scientific discourse than fact. Before I do so,

[55] Britten, *Art Magic*, p. 356. Cf. Britten, 'Unseen Universe', p. 54.
[56] Britten, 'Mental Telegraphy', p. 3.
[57] Britten, *Art Magic*, p. 356.

however, I would like to take some time to situate *Ghost Land* in the marginally scientific context of Spiritualism, psychical research, and the occult technologies of mediumship explored by both. This evaluation will help illustrate some of the historically unique ways in which a text could generate an SF mode in the period, in a manner that might seem quite alien — and indeed quite unrecognisable — to us today. Texts like *Ghost Land* deserve greater recognition for their science fictional elements, not just because they are important to the genre context of that time, but also because they participated in forming some of the tropes and stylistics that would go on to shape both genre and mode.[58]

Ghost Land enters these areas of intersection out of Britten's desire to use fiction (masquerading as a lengthy testimony to personal occult experience) to project the possibilities inherent in the 'spiritual chemistry' of Spiritism, thus creating numerous SF elements throughout. These elements are intermittent; indeed, as in most texts of the period, the SF mode is joined, and sometimes overcome, by fantastic elements more typical of genres less interested in verisimilitude — the gothic, romance, folklore. Elements of romance appear, for example, in a brief love affair between Louis and Juanita, Queen of the gypsies (p. 157), while accounts of will-o'-the-wisps and fairies have one foot in folktale and the other in serious exploration of the realm of elemental spirits which occultists believed to underpin all matter.[59] Most of Louis's adventures, while swashbucklingly entertaining, are difficult to swallow as strict accounts of personal experience. Yet, as we have seen, Britten often makes a sustained attempt to present his experiences and occult knowledge as naturalistic and empirically accessible. In doing so she provides the combination of imagination and mundanity, wonder and scientific sobriety that makes up the science fictional sense of verisimilitude.

Ghost Land reveals once again the importance of prolepticity to both science fiction and occultism, as it grapples with the radical strangeness of the spirit world, and the difficulty of accessing it with empirical research tools. An even more skilled and experienced adept named Chundra ad Deen tells Louis that though the spirit world is governed by immutable natural laws, these laws, and the realm itself, are currently inaccessible to humans and their conventional research methods. The key to resolving this estrangement for Chundra, as it was for Britten and many other Spiritualists, is mediumship. In the present most Spiritualist mediums 'give such teachings as the world is able to receive', garbled and simplified (p. 390). Yet, Chundra holds that

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[58] This assessment of *Ghost Land*'s dialogue with its scientific context could also represent a third area of intersection between SF and occultism: a tendency to envision new theories and imagined novums from pre-existing hypotheses or facts. This, however, seems to me to be too essential an aspect of knowledge creation to warrant a specific category of engagement.

[59] *GL*, pp. 113, 117–28. On occultism and the elementals see Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy*, p. 228. For Britten on the elemental realm see *GL*, pp. 34–35, 198–99; *Art Magic*, pp. 319–37.

in the future occult science will allow humans to achieve a true understanding of existence which includes the spirit realms and their inhabitants. Through a growing understanding of occult forces like magnetism, humanity will achieve the 'next phase of science' that will take it beyond passive mediumship toward closer communication with human, planetary, and elemental spirits (p. 397). The novel thus elaborates the future-directed priorities of Spiritualism, a movement that, as Shane McCorristine describes, 'looked forward to modern syntheses of bodies, minds and machines, to dreams of instantaneous communication and experimental proof of the afterlife.'[60]

In *Ghost Land*, this blend of empirical research technologies and occult mind is achieved in adepts like Louis and von Marx, whose abilities are ludic projections of the human enhancements that will result from the scientific exploitation of occult forces and spirit-based abilities. Dudley imagines the pair as 'heralds' of a day to come when powers 'still more potent than magnetism, still more occult than somnambulism' will be channelled by the human race (p. 246). Louis and von Marx are hybrids of spirit and matter, hints of the utopian future that will result from the new spiritual science Britten believed to be unfolding. Louis, at least, is aware that his knowledge and abilities point to a currently unimaginable future. Doubting that his narrative will be properly understood in the present, he proceeds anyway, for the sake of 'a succeeding generation' (p. 146).

Louis's spiritual scientific method is based in clairvoyance, one of the mediumship abilities unlocked in his childhood by von Marx. As Britten explained elsewhere, clairvoyance could entail a variety of psychic abilities,[61] in much the same way that Bulwer described 'mesmeric clairvoyance' in terms of both second-sight and telepathy. Thus, for example, Louis's clairvoyance is enhanced when he or other adepts project his spirit from his body and he travels astrally, parting the curtains of matter and transcending the limitations of space. In one key scene this 'clairvoyant vision' allows him to view the 'physiological conditions' of the London poor (p. 195), literally scrying into their bodies at a molecular level. He is thus able to explore 'the entire chain of connection between the brain and every fibre of the body', leaving him to conclude that the poor were often seemingly immoral and irrational because their brains were overcome by the nervous sensations produced by hunger (p. 196). This clairvoyant diagnostic x-ray ability was nothing new — it had already been reported by mesmerist trance subjects and researched by physicians like John Mill[62] — but it allows Louis to invent a technological solution for this

[60] McCorristine, 'General Introduction', p. xvii.

[61] See Britten, 'Mental Telegraphy'. For discussion of perceptions of clairvoyance in the period, see Hanegraaff, 'Theosophical Imagination'; McCorristine, 'General Introduction', p. xvi.

[62] See Mill, *Use of Clairvoyance in Medicine*. Cf. Gauld, p. 62; Tatar, p. 26.

problem, a '*brain metre*' that could detect disease and gauge the relationship between 'physical conditions' and 'corresponding states of mind' (p. 200).

In this and other clairvoyant events, Louis views much less mundane aspects of existence as well. He is able to peer through the fabric of matter and view the 'sub-mundane' realm of elemental spirits that he discovers to ensoul all matter. Gazing 'down into the earth' or 'into the water moistening his hands and face', he sees 'immense realms filling up the spaces of our gross atmosphere […] permeated with a wonderful number of countries, each formed of finer and more sublimated vapors, gases, aromal essences and ethers than the other' (p. 199). These beings of spirit are thus also creatures of matter, 'semi-spiritual natures, clothed with semi-material bodies' (p. 198). Louis's clairvoyant observation thus reveals a fabric of material existence much more complicated than that exposed by conventional empirical methods, one that supports Britten's Spiritist system, in which spirits evolve over many incarnations into a single human incarnation, after which they become developed souls that evolve further in the spirit lands after death. This cosmology of the sub-mundane also helped Britten synthesise Spiritualism, which denied reincarnation and was largely interested in human spirits,[63] with other occult movements, where the magical potential of elemental spirits or planetary intelligences received more attention.

This spiritual scientific observation of Earth-based realms, typified by different, usually more etheric gradations of matter and less evolved spirito-material elemental beings, is followed by a macrocosmic vision of outer space and its more advanced inhabitants. Louis's clairvoyant gaze is drawn upward, to the 'super-mundane' of the cosmos, enabling a vision of the universe that was already becoming part of science fiction's set of tropes and aesthetics. He is able to make astronomical observations with a clarity not achievable even by the telescopes of today — viewing 'glorious galaxies of worlds' and 'vast firmaments, spangled thick with suns and systems' (p. 201). Later, in another vision enabled by the concentred clairvoyant power of a group of adepts at Ellora, Louis is offered another opportunity for occult astronomy. This time his clairvoyant vision seems to take in the entire universe, 'blazing with systems, every system sparkling with suns, planets, comets, meteors, moons, rings, belts, and nebulæ'. Here clairvoyant astronomy allows Louis to make a scientific discovery which, in its fictional context, amounts to a relatively conventional astronomical novum. Focusing his 'observant gaze' on the revolution of the planets, Louis notes that though the planets move in circular orbits as described by conventional astronomy, further clairvoyant observation reveals 'subordinate motions, which impressed upon every flying orb the character of an individualized life' (p. 352). These erratic

[63] Britten believed in reincarnation, but did not believe, in contrast to most reincarnation systems, that a spirit could be human more than once.

motions, though subject to 'fixed law', lead Louis to hypothesise that the planets might actually be 'living, sentient beings' (p. 352). This leads him to a fascinating vision of the Earth itself as creature,

> with a framework of rocky ribs and mountain bones and sinews; veins and arteries coursed by the fluid-life of oceans and rivers; heaving lungs aerated by the breath of winds and atmospheres; electric life evolved from the galvanic action of metallic lodes, threading their way like a gigantic nervous system through every globe; vast reservoirs of polar force generated in the Arctic North and Antarctic South. (p. 353)

Louis also views this planetary being as 'one vast collective soul in the aggregated mass of soul atoms that maintain a parasitical life upon the surface of every planet' (p. 353). Thus, clairvoyant vision also offers the novel a source of evidence with which Britten's integrated cosmology of spirit and matter can be situated within a logically consistent structure. With the very same gaze that reveals astronomical discoveries, Louis also discovers 'sunny worlds on high', with 'sailing cars and airy ships carrying the rejoicing people of these sunny realms from point to point in space' (pp. 201–02). It is not entirely clear whether the occupants of these vehicles are physical alien beings or spirits occupying the spirit lands which Spiritualists believed to encircle physical planets.[64] In the context of Spiritualist and Theosophical beliefs that human spirits reincarnate in extra-terrestrial bodies, they can be read as both. As discussed in Chapter Five, Louis's clairvoyant astronautics are thus situated within science fiction's already centuries-old concern with space exploration and alien lifeforms. Through its influence on occultism, it may even have helped shape the manner in which the SF mode has imagined the universe and its extra-terrestrial inhabitants.

These spirit-powered mental space voyages are clearly influenced by a number of similar galactic journeys, particularly Swedenborg's visionary discovery of a plurality of inhabited spiritual and physical planets,[65] and Camille Flammarion's *Lumen* (1872), published in English as *Stories of Infinity* in 1873,[66] as Britten was working on *Ghost Land*. Her presentation of Louis's space exploration is still somewhat innovative, however. The extra-terrestrials she imagines anticipate science fictional imagery of the early twentieth century with their 'vast, globe-like heads' (p. 202), and the super-charged electric clairvoyance of the Ellora Brotherhood, while certainly based in occult thought and method, is a creative technologisation of mediumship. Britten also anticipates the science fictional creation of sublime wonder through representations

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[64] For more on these spirit realms and their liminal physicality, see pp. 215–20.

[65] Britten was, like most Spiritualists, familiar with Swedenborg's interplanetary spirit travel (on which see Dunér, pp. 470–74.

[66] See Stableford, Introduction to *Lumen*, p. xiv; Silverberg, p. vi.

of cosmic infinity. At a time when Verne's vision of traveling to the moon by cannon (*From the Earth to the Moon*, 1865) was still captivating the public imagination, Britten's clairvoyant method enabled space travel that presaged the expansive intergalactic stage of Golden Age space opera, or the cosmic scope of Olaf Stapledon's *Starmaker*.

Britten's speculative view of the fabric of the universe has strong spiritual elements, but Louis's clairvoyant method, along with the novel's frequent appeals to scientific discourse and naturalistic structures, lends her strange cosmic visions the verisimilitude of science fiction. This effect is unlikely to have been experienced by readers in later times, but it was plausible for many in a nineteenth-century context where clairvoyance had a degree of proleptic scientific legitimacy, and where the urge to reconcile science and religion left even leading scientists open to the possibility that future science would reveal naturalistic realms of spirit and soul. Just as Bulwer consciously adjusted his fantastic narrative for 'the brains' of his time, so Britten adapted both her science of Spiritism and her fiction in an attempt to meet the technoscientific needs of the enframed nineteenth-century subject. Louis's occult observational techniques also connect to science fiction's frequent concern with speculative technologies. For Britten, clairvoyance and its related mediumship abilities were not supernatural spiritual gifts, but physiological processes. Mediumship was thus a psychical *human technology*. Scientific advancement of such technologies is the key to the future evolution of humankind which Britten's Spiritism anticipated. It is Louis's evolved capacity to deploy them that renders him an advanced medium and magician.

Though it may seem anachronistic to speak of human or spiritual technology, I use the term quite purposefully. Spiritualism, more than any other occult movement, was in constant dialogue with the rapid technological development of the age. A number of mechanical inventions and processes were introduced to prove the objective reality of Spiritualist phenomena, including spirit photography and the 'spiritoscopes' of American chemist Robert Hare — machines placed between mediums and the beings they channelled to test whether actual messages were coming from the spirit world.[67] Other technological advances helped facilitate the engagement of spirits with the physical world, often rekindling flagging enthusiasm for the movement. 1868 saw the introduction of the planchette — a small hand-rest with wheels and a pencil — to enhance automatic writing. The 1870s saw a sudden spike in the full materialisation of spirits into physical form, which had only rarely been reported before. This development coincided with the

[67] On spirit photography and its perceived opportunity for objective proof of spirit phenomena, see McGarry, pp. 106–11. On Hare's spiritoscopes see Gutierrez, pp. 56–61. Britten claimed to have been one of the mediums involved with Hare's experiments (*Autobiography*, p. 118).

introduction of ‘spirit cabinets’ — roofless closets into which the medium would retreat before a spirit emerged some time later.[68]

Even more importantly for the question of Spiritualism’s relation to SF, many of the possibilities of mediumship were theorised using the images and language of the new technological age. When microscopes could reveal, in Britten’s words, ‘a nation in a dewdrop’, and telescopes ‘the existence of millions of suns, stars, and systems equally hidden from the limited perception of the external sense of sight’, why would it not be assumed that the world of spirit, too, simply awaited naturalistic discovery by more advanced scientific tools?[69] Spirit communication was frequently compared, for example, to the function of the telegraph and the railway, both of which annihilated previous conceptions of the distance to be travelled to reach another world — be that Ohio or the spirit realm. To give just one example, Canadian Spiritualist George Walrond called the spirits ‘God’s telegraph operators’, and viewed the mediums themselves as telegraph wires to humanity.[70] Scientific explanations for the electric forces that enabled the telegraph also helped explain spirit communication. Some envisioned an electric fluid to be traveling the telegraph wire, an image that Spiritualists used to propose a literal spirit cord along which a similar etheric fluid could travel, tying the minds of spirits together with the psyches of mediums.[71] Mediumship was further chained to technology by the perception that Spiritualist phenomena had suddenly increased following Hydesville because *the spirits themselves*, led by the spirit of Ben Franklin, had developed technologies in the otherworld with which they could communicate with the living.[72] Though, like Britten, many Spiritualists believed that humankind had always possessed the mental and spiritual capabilities required for mediumship, the ‘foundations of the new religion of Nature’ were in the course of being established by technological developments that made the connection to the spirit world more stable.[73]

Louis’s powers are amplified by similar technological advances. He finds, for example, that the adepts at Ellora have discovered how to magnify magic and mediumship with electricity: ‘The discovery and application of electric force as a means of stimulating mental power, created a complete new era in this remarkable fraternity, and urged forward its adepts to a class of fresh

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[68] On the development of spiritual technologies through the nineteenth century see Noakes, ‘Spiritualism, Science and the Supernatural’, p. 27; Kerr, p. 109; McGarry, pp. 101–03.

[69] Britten, 'Extracts from "Ghostland," Vol. II […] Part VI', p. 291. Louis follows up on this idea in detail in ‘Extracts from “Ghost Land,” Vol. II […] Part XI’.

[70] Walrond, p. 434. Cf. Gutierrez, p. 49; McCorristine, *Spectres of the Self*, p. 11.

[71] Gutierrez, p. 50.

[72] This idea was floated as early as 1851 by A.J. Davis (*Philosophy of Spiritual Intercourse*, pp. 77–78). Cf. Kerr, p. 31.

[73] Attributed to the Chevalier in 'Extracts from "Ghostland," Vol. II […} Part IV', p. 176. For Britten on technological advancements in the spirit world see 'Historical Spiritualism’, p. 219.

experiments, some of which have been of the most stupendous character' (p. 362). Through these experiments, the Elloran adepts find that electricity can be used to share the clairvoyant vision of those with particularly strong mediumship powers with less gifted neophytes. Galvanic batteries are applied to the adepts to increase their powers, while a combination of telepathic communication and 'fine metallic lines' spread throughout the temple share the results with the others (p. 362). Given the connections between the novel and Britten's own experience, it may be that this account is based on experiments conducted by Britten herself — or at least on their desired outcome — as Louis states that he and 'my friend, Mrs. Emma Hardinge Britten' had success expanding their powers of 'mental telegraphy' by 'means of energizing the subtile though variable powers of vital magnetism, which tended to render its operation more than ever reliable and uniform' (p. 362).

Whether augmented by physical technologies or not, Louis's clairvoyant power represents a psychical research tool that Britten, like many occultists and psychical researchers, saw as the key to uncovering countless secrets of nature. Annie Besant, for example, noted, like Britten, that scientific instruments were unable to actually observe the atomic structures theorised by particle physics, and proposed an 'astral vision' similar to Louis's clairvoyance as a solution to the problem.[74] She and Leadbeater, her long-time partner in occult experimentation, used this astral vision to scry the atomic structure of all the known elements, even discovering new ones, like 'Occultum,' that had not yet (and still have not) been discovered by more prosaic scientific research. Though most of their observations do not match with data gathered by scientists using more conventional techniques, Stephen Phillips, a theoretical physicist and advocate for the study of 'psionics', has argued that Besant and Leadbeater's results bear notable similarities to later discoveries in particle physics.[75] One of the atomic formations Besant and Leadbeater proposed predicted the neon-22 isotope discovered by Nobel prize winning physicist Francis Aston five years later. Aston's journals show that his encounter with their ideas motivated him to search in particular directions in making his isotope discoveries.[76] For Besant and Leadbeater, clairvoyance was a human technology capable of exploring the nature of the universe in a way that more physical instruments could not. *Ghost Land*'s presentation of mediumship as an active occult power presages these later developments, portraying Louis's abilities not just as the passive reception of spirit messages that most Spiritualists felt mediumship to be, but as an active application of human technology.

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[74] Besant, p. 211.
[75] Phillips, pp. 8–9.
[76] See Hughes, pp. 32–33; Noakes, '"World of the Infinitely Little"', p. 329.

This conflation of passive mediumship and active psychical power is another aspect of Britten's attempt to entwine Spiritualism with other aspects of occultism, often differentiated along such lines. Louis frequently insists that mediumship enables advanced scientific knowledge, but, in the vein of occultism's modernisation of ancient knowledge, it is also connected with ancient wisdom and early modern natural magic.[77] Occult methods of spiritual and mental communication are, Britten acknowledges in *Art Magic*, distinctly magical, but magic is 'the science of Spiritism,' and thus 'should be studied and legitimately used' by spiritual scientists (p. 103). Magic thus becomes provocatively entangled with the assumptions of scientific naturalism and modern technological positivism, forming a trifecta that proved formative in the occult revival. *Ghost Land* likely played a small role, along with more impactful sources such as the novels of Bulwer-Lytton and writings of Madame Blavatsky, in perpetuating the concept of active mediumship as an empirical research technology that could be used to explore the heights and depths of the universe.

Both areas of intersection discussed in the previous chapter are thus operative in the emergence of an SF mode from Britten's serious exploration of occultism in fiction. In addition to modernising ancient magical knowledge, the novel relies on prolepticity in its depiction of a future spiritual science based in the research methods of mediumship. The Chevalier's compendium of abilities — spirit communication, invocation of elemental and planetary spirits, clairvoyant vision of physical, spiritual, and astral spaces, astral teleportation, telepathy, magical power, and 'all the natural qualifications for a magnetizer, biologist, healer, astrologer'[78] — extrapolate the furthest extent of the dreams of occultism, dreams that were not depicted as fancy but as human technologies that would one day be substantiated by empirical observation. As we have seen, belief in the possibilities offered by mediumship was not limited to occultists and Spiritualists. Research by biologists, physicists, and mental physiologists into the phenomena of the mind and spirit sustained a marginal place in scientific circles, maintaining a Kuhnian 'early-fact gathering' status.[79] Because of the perpetually hypothetical status of its human technological prognostications, *Ghost Land* is as much a strange religious fantasy as it is a contributor to a long tradition of psychical science fiction, which has continued to exploit tropes from clairvoyance to telepathy as it imagines the radical physics and cosmologies made possible by a universe in which the mind possesses the extensive range of the Chevalier Louis de B——.

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[77] See, e.g., *GL*, pp. 85–86.
[78] *GL*, p. 220.
[79] Kuhn, pp. 15–17.

The naturalisation of the supernatural

Because its powers of observation so far outstrip conventional scientific research tools, *Ghost Land*'s central novum of active mediumship allows Britten to frame a much wider spectrum of 'scientific' knowledge than that proposed by leading scientific naturalists in the period. This group insisted on a methodology that placed the supernatural, the spiritual, and all related phenomena outside the purview of science, largely because of its empirical inaccessibility. Scientific naturalists did not necessarily reject the possibility of psychical and spiritual phenomena. Henry Maudsley, an influential naturalistic voice in mental physiology, admitted that there was some logic in the tendency of occultists and psychical researchers to theorise psychic states and powers as functions or manifestations of etheric fluids or forces: 'Matter does undoubtedly exist in so fine, subtile, and, so to speak, spiritualized a state as to be imperceptible to human sense, and in that condition is amazingly active [and] it is possible we may be […] affected powerfully by it.' However, he felt that an overactive reliance on imaginative hypothesis had led occultists and scientists alike to populate 'a world of spiritual beings of human kind',[80] essentially applying the laws defined by time and space to 'beings and events of eternity and infinity' (p. 121; cf. p. 143). Such projections of natural law to an unobservable supernal realm were for Maudsley 'a revival or recrudescence of a still-surviving superstition, not a new conquest of scientific thought' (p. 176). Yet, as a number of intellectual historians have illustrated, the boundaries between natural and supernatural which Maudsley and other scientific naturalists constructed were frequently challenged. A plethora of countervailing voices were arrayed against the naturalists, rejecting or correcting their bracketing of the supernatural. These voices could be those of professional scientists like Lodge, Crookes, and Wallace, but they also emerged from other areas of society; religious forums and literature proved popular platforms for such dissent.[81]

Occultism and science fiction, unsurprisingly, were common spheres in which the methods and perspectives of scientific naturalism were debated and adapted. Rarely, however, was naturalism rejected outright in these forums. Rather, occultists and SF writers accepted the basic methodological premise of naturalism — that the supernatural should be bracketed from scientific inquiry — but expanded the scope of the natural, in what Egil Asprem calls 'open-ended naturalism'.[82] As Asprem observes, 'One naturalist's supernatural may be another's nature'.[83]

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[80] Maudsley, *Natural Causes and Supernatural Seemings*, p. 176.

[81] See Dawson and Lightman, Introduction to *Victorian Scientific Naturalism*, pp. 13–14.

[82] Asprem, *Problem of Disenchantment*, pp. 9–10, 78, 302–03. Cf. Taves, pp. 174–75; Noakes, 'Spiritualism, Science and the Supernatural', pp. 24–25.

[83] Asprem, *Problem of Disenchantment*, p. 76.

Alongside more cautious approaches such as Maudsley's, far more expansive views of the range of the physical universe and the extent of the phenomena that could be accessed through scientific investigation also held sway. Theosophist A.P. Sinnett argued, in contradistinction to Maudsley's differentiation between physical and spiritual laws, that 'occultism shows that the harmony and smooth continuity of Nature observable in physics extend to those operations of Nature that are concerned with the phenomena of metaphysical existence'.[84] For Spiritualist Gerald Massey, spiritual science expanded this 'continuity of the physicist', making 'the two worlds one, and the supernatural has become a law of natural sequence'.[85] These views represent a naturalisation of the supernatural, an expansion of materiality and physicality into the supernal and spiritual, but the effect was a drawing of the supernatural down to the natural, opening it up to empirical investigation. This was the motivation behind Myers's framing of the supernormal. There was no reason, Myers opined, 'to suppose that the psychical phenomena with which we deal are less a part of nature, or less subject to fixed and definite law, than any other phenomena […] they are above the norm of man rather than outside his nature.'[86] With this open-ended naturalism, occultists and psychical researchers opened the laboratory doors to a wide variety of phenomena, including spirit communication, clairvoyance, and telepathy, situating them within a universe subject to natural laws in all its realms and manifestations, from the coarsest physical substance to the finest gradations of etheric matter.

Much of Britten's purpose in *Ghost Land* is to communicate a similarly open-ended structure of the universe. 'Supernaturalism,' she said in *Modern American Spiritualism*, 'melts away […] before the morning sun of that glorious light that science brings, leaving no refuge for our world of occult facts but to range them within the domain of unexplained but inevitable law' (p. 10). Louis's astral and clairvoyant observations reveal this world to be divided into the mundane material world visible to man, the 'sub-mundane' world of the elementals, and the 'super-mundane' realms of ascended human spirits, angels, and spiritual suns.[87] These latter two are precisely the aspects of existence that naturalists saw as the purview of belief and imagination rather than science, but Britten extends her more open-ended vision to the furthest possible extent. At the apex of his electrically enhanced clairvoyant experience at Ellora, Louis's view of the entire universe allows him to substantiate the existence of a naturalistic divine — the central spiritual sun envisioned by Emmanuel Swedenborg and adopted by a number of occultists and

[84] Sinnett, *Occult World*, p. 6.
[85] Massey, p. 48.
[86] Myers, p. xxii.
[87] For Britten on the sub-mundane see *GL*, pp. 34–35, 55, 198–99; *Art Magic*, pp. 319–37. On the 'super-mundane' see *GL*, pp. 317–21; *Art Magic*, pp. 16–18.

Spiritualists in the period.[88] Around it the galaxy revolves, deriving from this sphere all life and energy. It is both God and a constant emanating source of three building blocks of Britten's universe: matter, spirit, and force. Matter and spirit are both physical substances, but are divided by gradation — matter the coarse, material substance, spirit a similar but much finer, etheric form.[89] Matter and spirit are inextricably linked and frequently interact, but they would not be able to engage without 'force', the third member of this 'grand trinity of being'.[90] In an extreme version of the unified fluid theory, Britten proposes that all forces can be linked to this single substance: electricity, galvanism, magnetism, light, heat, vitalism, 'divine fire', and the astral fluid or astral light are all manifestations.[91] It is force that enables the technologies of mediumship that make access to the spirit world possible.[92] Louis's clairvoyant scientific method legitimates itself by revealing — within *Ghost Land* and according to Britten's Spiritism at least — the very naturalistic forces which enable his mind to mediate between matter and spirit. This cosmic structure — and the clairvoyant method of observing it — subvert scientific naturalism by co-opting its language and assumptions to radically expand its scope.

Emerging from this elision of the supernatural, many elements of *Ghost Land* that seem otherworldly or folkloric become naturalistically justified. Within the confines of Britten's occult cosmology, Louis's clairvoyant research and the knowledge it produces are much more clearly science fictional than they might otherwise appear. Equipped with naturalised technologies for mental astronautics, the Chevalier dons the generic jumpsuit of science fiction's leading epic theme — the voyage into unknown spaces made accessible through technoscientific advancement. Just as the crew of *Star Trek*'s *Enterprise* 'boldly go where no one has gone before', Louis 'researches into still more distant lands than any hitherto known to earth's inhabitants.'[93] Much of this *terra incognita* of the spirit world is simply physical or quasi-physical terrain awaiting proper exploration. In this sense, Louis's galactic vision describes a universe of undiscovered beings that simply awaits rocket-fuelled exploration of the stars in order to verify the observations that have already been made through clairvoyant mediumship, just as Aston verified Besant and Leadbeater's discovery of neon-22.

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[88] See Swedenborg, *Divine Love and Wisdom*, pp. 83–86, 88, 93, 97.

[89] See *GL*, pp. 71, 317, 324.

[90] Britten, *Art Magic*, p. 16. Cf. p. 117. A similar idea had been expounded the year before by two leading British physicists, Balfour Stewart and Peter Guthrie Tait, in *The Unseen Universe: Or, Physical Speculations on a Future State* (1875). See Noakes, '"World of the Infinitely Little"', p. 329.

[91] *GL*, p. 54. Cf. Britten, *Art Magic*, pp. 16–18. Spiritualists were less reliant on universal fluid theories to explain phenomena than the mesmerists discussed in the last chapter, but conflated concepts of force were still common, and proved particularly useful for explaining mediumship and the ability of spirits to act upon matter. See Oppenheim, pp. 217–18.

[92] Britten, *Art Magic*, p. 424.

[93] Britten, 'Extracts from "Ghostland," Vol. II […] Part VII', p. 335.

Louis's clairvoyance thus enables Britten to imagine confirmation of the deductive hypotheses of her spiritual science. Scientific naturalists abhorred such approaches. Deduction and hypothesis were important aspects of scientific method, but, as Maudsley warned, 'Imagination is certainly not competent to fill the voids of present knowledge of nature'.[94] Science fiction writers and occultists came together in refutation of this statement, for both ludic and, in the case of authors like Britten, more serious purposes. Bulwer is another example of an occultist who explored the unknown and hypothetical with an open-ended naturalistic spirit that generates an SF mode. The psychical researcher narrator of *Haunted*, for example, adds verisimilitude to the novel's Spiritualist phenomena by distinguishing between the supernatural and the unknown.

> What is called supernatural is only a something in the laws of nature of which we have been hitherto ignorant. Therefore, if a ghost rise before me, I have not the right to say, "So, then, the supernatural is possible," but rather, "So, then, the apparition of a ghost is, contrary to received opinion, within the laws of nature — i.e. not supernatural." (p. 35).

The key to establishing the boundaries of the natural, empirically accessible universe is thus, for Bulwer's narrator, not ideology but observation. *Haunted* embraces both science and naturalism, but resists the physical limitations of scientists like Huxley and Maudsley by simultaneously insisting that if a thing has been observed it must somehow belong to the natural, even if currently deemed impossible and miraculous.

Science fiction, a genre centrally oriented around the effort to make plausible the unknown, the impossible, and the supernatural, has continued to mimic this naturalisation of the psychical and spiritual, regardless of whether an author shares Britten's and Bulwer's approval of the occult scientific background of this ontology. Another example from the early period is Gottfried Plattner's journey to an 'Other-World' of human spirits in H.G. Wells's 'The Plattner Story' (1896). The Other-World is a realm physically nested within our own, so much so that one can view its phosphorescent glow in rooms darkened in the manner required for most Victorian séances. Wells's decision to portray this realm as physical rather than supernaturally immaterial, is a nod to the 'unseen universe' of Spiritualism. The reference is somewhat playful, and certainly satirical, as the narrator notes that 'I must point out — what so many writers upon obscure psychic phenomena fail to do — that we are passing here from the practically undeniable to that kind of matter which any reasonable man is entitled to believe or reject as he thinks proper.'[95] Yet, Wells

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[94] Maudsley, *Natural Causes and Supernatural Seemings*, p. 120.
[95] Wells, 'Plattner Story', p. 107.

clearly saw the naturalised spirit realm of occultism as a source of wonder with enough epistemic currency to cast a sense of verisimilitude over the story.

This formula has proven valuable for SF writers up to the present day, as the naturalised supernatural has joined radical hypotheses and future technologies in the science fictional imagination's attempt to 'fill the voids of present knowledge'. In doing so it has frequently returned to occult knowledge, where the supernatural is already conveniently framed in a naturalistic manner. An example from one of SF's most canonical texts is the 'psychokinesthetic' clairvoyance of Paul Atreides, his mother Jessica, and other Bene Gesserit witches and Fremen mystics in Frank Herbert's canonical *Dune* (1965). This ability functions in much the same manner as the clairvoyance Louis exercises when diagnosing the London poor. After Jessica takes a draught of a psychoactive substance called 'water-of-life' she enters a trance state and creates a 'psychokinesthetic extension of herself' which allows her to view her own body at a molecular level. She clairvoyantly envisions the 'dancing particles within her […] recognising familiar structures, atomic linkages: a carbon atom here, helical wavering'. She recognises a particular protein that is threatening the life of her own body and 'with her psychokinesthetic probing, she moved into it, shifted an oxygen mote, allowed another carbon mote to link, reattached a linkage of oxygen' (p. 96). Paul exhibits the same ability, but without substance assistance, scrying his blood on the sword of the villainous Feyd-Rautha, identifying a soporific poison within that blade, and realigning 'his own metabolism to match this threat and change the molecules of the soporific' (p. 611). There is, of course, nothing scientific or plausible about these events, but biological, chemical, and medical discourse, combined with a naturalisation of psychic power and 'psychokinesthetic' (ie. astral) selves, makes them verisimilar within the novel's unique ontology and allows suspended disbelief for the enframed reader.

There is, however, another, more complex reading of the relationship between natural and supernatural in SF and occultism, one that is also explored in *Ghost Land*. Britten's open-ended naturalism leads her to ground Louis's occult knowledge and experiences in an unseen world that, though currently occulted by its empirical inaccessibility, is yet justified by an adherence to natural laws that will be revealed in time. However, even the Chevalier's most powerful clairvoyance cannot completely overcome this inaccessibility. Despite the seemingly limitless possibilities offered by his occult gaze, and despite the claimed naturalism of the spirit world, Louis eventually comes up against ineffability. He realises that without further bio-spiritual advancement he risks being 'overwhelmed in immensities of being, too vast for finite humanity to comprehend'.[96] Like other aspects of Louis's occult 'autobiography', this experience seems to

[96] *GL*, p. 482.

emerge from Britten's perception of her own Spiritist research. She admits in her autobiography that after many fruitless attempts to gather knowledge of the spirit world from its inhabitants, she had to conclude that while it was a realm which functions by natural laws, they may not be accessible to human understanding: 'They work by laws, as we do. Do we know those laws? Assuredly not' (p. 44).

The universe revealed by the fictionalised mediumship of *Ghost Land* is thus indicative of the (often productive) tension between the competing naturalisms of the period. As noted by Nicola Bown, Carolyn Burdett, and Pamela Thurschwell, not all Spiritualists saw the spirit realm as an 'as yet undiscovered material form'. Many continued to see the land of the dead as supernatural and entirely removed from the physical world.[97] This suited the more dualistic view of Christian Spiritualists, but it was likely also the result of the immense influence of Swedenborg, who did not, like many esoteric thinkers (including Britten), assume the interconnectedness of the spiritual and material worlds. For Swedenborg, the material world was a separate realm operating according to natural law, while the supernatural existed apart, not connected to the natural, but still in 'correspondence' with it.[98] This idea of two 'separate-yet-connected' planes of reality was also influential in nineteenth-century occultism, and seems to be paradoxically ongoing in Britten's thought at the same time as her insistence that the divine itself was a natural, yet spiritual central sun. Her labelling of the spirit world as a 'super-mundane' realm echoes Robert Dale Owen's similar concept of the 'ultra-mundane', a realm that is indeed ruled by natural laws which might one day be understood, but as yet are 'unknown or obscurely discerned'.[99]

In their obscurity, realms such as Britten's 'Ghost Land' might thus seem less useful for SF writers, and less applicable to the developmental history of the genre, but the SF mode has long exploited a similar paradox. As discussed further in Chapter Five, science fiction has long been interested in the unknown that lies just beyond the limits of imaginative projection. The engagement with alterity that still holds strong in SF's gothic genes has resulted in the horrific extra-terrestrial encounters of Ridley Scott's *Alien* films, or the sublime weirdness of Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) and Andrei Tarkovsky's *Solaris* (1972). All three insist on veracity even as they encounter the ineffable — for it is partly in incomprehensibility that the terror of the gothic mode functions.[100] The execution of this gothic strangeness seems to require

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[97] Nicola Bown and others, p. 7. Cf. Gomel, '"Spirits in the Material World"', pp. 191–92.

[98] See Hanegraaff, *Western Esotericism*, pp. 132–34.

[99] Owen, *Footfalls on the Boundary of Another World*, pp. xi, xii, 25. Cf. Noakes, 'Spiritualism, Science and the Supernatural', p. 29.

[100] A connection first proposed by Edmund Burke as part of his well-known theory of the sublime. See *Philosophical Enquiry*, p. 54. On obscurity and the gothic mode see Groom, p. 77.

the same paradoxical relationship to the supernatural that is found in *Ghost Land*, where the incomprehensible light of the spirit realm lurks just outside the naturalistic light shed by the technologies of mediumship.

Discourse over fact

The naturalisation of the supernatural is a key aspect of Scarborough's 'scientific fictive supernaturalism'. Science, she observed in 1917, nine years before Gernsback's first editorial in *Amazing Stories* and sixteen years before Wells mused about 'scientific pitter-patter', 'is an excellent hook to hang supernatural tales upon, for it gives an excuse for believing anything, however incredible'. She noted that an important aspect of this scientific verisimilitude was discursive: readers 'will swallow the wildest improbability if the bait be labeled science or psychical research. No supernaturalism is incredible if it is expressed in technical terminology' (p. 252). Much later, but with almost a full century more mega-textual evidence to consider, Istvan Csicsery-Ronay explores this appeal to scientific discourse as part of SF's 'imaginary science' — arguing that scientific language is a big part of SF's 'playful imitation of technoscientific imagining':[101]

> Language that adheres closely to discursive models of empiricism — detailed, concrete, logical, and materialist — gains the assent of readers who wish to conform to, and even support, the commonsense language of empirical truth. The trickster's best tool is the language of recognizable science. (p. 127)

Leaving aside Csicsery-Ronay's association of the SF writer with prestidigitation for the moment,[102] we find here a clear recipe for verisimilitude. In order to make novums appear more consistent with the currents of enframing, SF writers frequently apply terms derived from established scientific knowledge, coin neologisms consistent with the presentation of radical new hypotheses or technologies, or mimic the tone and cadence of scientific reportage. SF theorists have even observed science fiction's evolution of a particular approach to narration that helps identify a text as science fictional. Samuel R. Delany delimits the mega-text (which he calls the SF 'textus') in terms of the use of previously encountered 'language and language-functions' that shape the reader's encounter of a text as science fictional.[103] Thus, phrases like 'the door dilated', from Robert Heinlein's *Beyond This Horizon* (1942), are only understood by the reader to mean

[101] Csicsery-Ronay, p. 115. Csicsery-Ronay is particularly interested in SF's scientific-seeming neologisms. See pp. 13–46.

[102] But see p. 227.

[103] Delany, *Triton*, pp. 333–41.

'the door opened' because they have been prepared for the anachronism of Heinlein's language by previous SF texts.[104] This unique set of linguistic approaches is the result of an intertextual evolution ongoing within the mega-text since at least the time of *Frankenstein*.[105] Throughout this period, SF has formed its genre-defining approaches to terminology and narratology in dialogue with a wide range of technoscientific phenomena. Indeed, as Csicsery-Ronay helpfully illustrates, SF mediates a matrix of concepts, terms, and discourses in which 'as long as scientific ideas are widely circulated they become part of an enormous fluid social narrative, assimilated simultaneously to old and new concerns' (p. 115). Occultists of the period in which early SF thrived, and indeed most esoteric thinkers since, boxed above their weight-class in contributing to the discursive adaptation of technoscientific language. This mutual appeal to scientific discursivity is thus another central area of intersection between SF and occultism, one in which each seems to have informed the rhetorics of the other, sometimes, as in Britten's *Ghost Land*, within the same text.

Occultism and science fiction benefited similarly from literary developments in scientific culture. Growth in literacy rates provided a customer base for mass market fiction and created generations of readers educated in the basic tenets of scientific method and knowledge.[106] This readership was not merely interested in the physical sciences — it quested for information regarding all things archaeological, anthropological, religious, literary, historical, psychological, sociological, and linguistic. Scientists, particularly in the early- to mid-century period, frequently accommodated this goal as they sought to establish their methods as the preeminent form of gaining and establishing knowledge, sharing their observations in formats very much like science fiction novels. Long sections of prose communicated experimental methods and findings, with very little advanced mathematics or charts that might leave the common reader behind. As Martin Willis observes, 'Scientific language […] was the language of literary culture: ideas were expressed through metaphor and simile, with poets and dramatists cited as sources of authority alongside scientific predecessors.'[107]

This relationship between science and metaphor influenced the development of several key nineteenth-century genres. Literary realism and naturalism have both been traced to the stylistics

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[104] Ibid. p. 366.

[105] See Brown, 'Utopias and Heterotopias', p. 59.

[106] Bould and Vint, p. 36.

[107] Willis, p. 7. Cf. Cantor, 'Rhetoric of Experiment', p. 166; Levine, *Realistic Imagination*, p. 253; Dawson and Lightman, Introduction to *Victorian Science and Literature*, pp. viii–xv. For a contrasting view of this idea that science and literature constituted 'one culture' prior to the late nineteenth century, see White, esp. pp. 78, 90–91.

of scientific reportage and to a mimicry of empirical method itself.[108] Science fiction followed these genres in its approach to establishing verisimilitude, but generally did so with a more direct dialogue with the scientific knowledge and method it emulated, in addition to a non-realist adoption of fantastic images, events, and causalities. This combination of ingredients is captured by Bulwer-Lytton's description of *The Coming Race* as 'perhaps a romance but such a romance as a Scientific amateur […] might compose'.[109] Authors of texts on mesmerist, Theosophical, Spiritualist, or magical principles frequently followed the same recipe. Their ultimate goal was not, as it was for the SF author, the casting of the ludic spell of verisimilitude, but the application of this scientistic gauze was necessary, whether applied consciously or unconsciously, to persuade readers as to the empirical legitimacy of supernormal phenomena. The tone and stylistics of scientific reportage — the invention of neologisms, careful descriptions of phenomena, frequent cautions against accepting facts and/or beliefs without proper testing — proved helpful to both occultists and SF writers as they adapted marginal or rejected knowledge into frameworks amenable to enframing.[110]

Ghost Land, like *Art Magic,* relies heavily on the occultist appeal to scientific discursivity, generating an SF mode as it does so. Miriam Wallraven argues that this is Britten's most common strategy for legitimating her occult and Spiritualist beliefs. Rather than expose occult phenomena to the probing of the laboratory, she wrote occultism 'closer into the centre of the semiosphere' — the scientific community in which discourses related to dominant, established paradigms are created and maintained.[111] This discursive conflation of occultism and technoscience is clearly visible, for example, in her descriptions of the Ellora Brotherhood's use of electricity to amplify clairvoyance and spirit communication. Britten appears to have gone past discourse into method and application in her interest in such occult applications of electromagnetism. She and her husband experimented with electric medicine and wrote a manual on its practical application. She may have helped William design his 'Home Battery Electro-Magnetic Machine' with which patients could electrically self-medicate.[112] However, the Brittens' invocation of electrical theory reflects Cathy Gutierrez's observation that Spiritualist technoscience often gave way to amateur science in which few, including those who formed theories 'predicated on vague notions of electricity' actually understood the physical processes at work, yet all felt free to co-opt

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[108] Levine, *Realistic Imagination*, p. 253. Maioli, esp. pp. 170–77; Smith, 'Victorian Novel and Science', p. 456.

[109] Qtd. in Seed, Introduction to *The Coming Race*, p. xv. On the relationship between Victorian scientific writing and SF, see Smith, 'Victorian Novel and Science', pp. 443–44.

[110] See Hammer, p. 204.

[111] Wallraven, pp. 398, 405.

[112] Britten, *Autobiography*, p. 224; Mathiesen, *Unseen Worlds of Emma Hardinge Britten*, pp. 18–19.

'metaphors for cutting-edge technology'.[113] Britten, like many occultists, applied these metaphors within the innovative, hypothetical space created by the incomplete scientific understanding of electro-magnetism.[114] Metaphor and analogy are ordinary aspects of scientific reportage, but occultists, like SF writers, tended to apply them more haphazardly than a trained researcher would ever dare, freely disembedding scientific discursive elements from the empirical context in which they had been created or substantiated.

Applied to mediumship, electricity becomes, as described in *Art Magic*, 'the all-potential magician' (p. 355). *Ghost Land* is permeated with similar examples of discursive appeals to scientific legitimacy: the soul is analogically established as a material substance based on its elemental similarities to wind, air, and ether (p. 71), while neologisms with a scientific timbre are employed to legitimise occult concepts, as when 'photosphere' is substituted for 'aura' (p. 24). Britten seems to have been quite aware of the discursive aspects of scientific legitimation. In attempting, for example, to show that there was no difference between ancient medical magic and the electrical medical advances of her own day, she highlighted the discursive distinctions between old and new. 'When we put forth the announcement that by electro-biology we shall enable one person to influence the minds of others, or when we announce that with the aid of electricity we can produce results by invisible force to work strange facts, we are scientists, not magicians.'[115] In Britten's eyes, it was not she who was falsely legitimating her ideas according to modern science by adopting its discourses, but modern science that was subverting truth itself by claiming an inauthentic distinction between its powerful new explanatory mechanisms and the knowledge forms of the past. Science did not reveal new knowledge so much as it provided a novel form of reportage with which to describe phenomena that had always been.

The novel spends much of Louis's time with the Ellora Brotherhood employing scientific discourse in order to insist on the empirical reality of such phenomena. A full five pages are dedicated to explaining the spirito-physical science behind the electrically enhanced mediumship of its adepts. Britten's presentation of the technology of mediumship thus employs the 'infodump' of science fiction to establish the empirical value of abilities like clairvoyance.[116] She draws even more starkly from the scientific semiosphere in communicating its results. This is particularly true of the several acts of medical scrying carried out by Louis, the results of which

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[113] Gutierrez, pp. 4–5.

[114] As already discussed in Bulwer's case, and as further discussed in relation to Corelli's 'psychic creed' in the next chapter, the pre-paradigmatic state of knowledge about electricity and magnetism frequently attracted metaphysical interpretations and adaptations in the period. See Dobson; Moore, p. 29.

[115] Britten, 'Ancient Magic', p. 267. Louis associates this concept with the magicians of the 'Orphic Circle' in *Ghost Land* (p. 88).

[116] On 'expositional infodumps' see Csicsery-Ronay, p. 114.

resemble passages from medical journals or textbooks. At one point, travelling through Wales, he mentally views the bodily interior of the famous 'Welsh fasting girl', looking to discover 'physical causes' for the apparently miraculous duration of her fast (pp. 147–51). He discovers that her body has rearranged itself to live on more etheric food via a paralysis that has spread 'throughout the ganglionic system' and impinged the 'cerebro-spinal nerves,' affecting the medulla and cerebellum. 'The pneumagastric nerve' is most affected (pp. 149–50). Critics who have militated against connections between SF and magic might argue that the discursive elements of Britten's appeal to science invalidate *Ghost Land* as science fiction, or even as a protoplasmic generic antecedent. I would argue the opposite: *Ghost Land* is indicative of the tendency of science fiction to thrive on ideas and concepts which substantiate themselves by disembedding the language used to describe empirically derived discoveries and theories.

This dynamic was particularly operative in early SF, written in a context in which scientific reportage still contained echoes of the 'one culture' relationship that had defined links between literature and science earlier in the century. The discursive aspects of occult and science fictional claims to scientific legitimacy have been particularly useful when producing or connecting to proleptic knowledge. Science fiction and occultism emulate the discourse of those who, like Britten, cannot yet provide proof for their hypotheses but use analogical reasoning and the terminology of more established theories to substantiate their claims. In light of this comparison, the spiritual and astral realms of occultism seem to possess a shared cultural lineage with the alternate dimensions of science fiction. Time machines and somnambulism, warp drives and astral travel — all of these define themselves as scientific by appealing to scientific discourse within the hypothetical space of anticipated future knowledge.

Conclusion: *Ghost Land* and the mega-text

Ghost Land's naturalisations of the supernatural and appeals to the occult scientific semiosphere help situate it dialogically within the complex fabrics of nineteenth-century scientific debate, Spiritualism, and literary culture. As discussed further in Chapter Five, *Ghost Land* is one of a surprising number of novels which generate an SF mode from attempts to scientifically legitimate spirit phenomena in Spiritualism and psychical research. Some of *Ghost Land's* central concerns — the human technologies of mediumship, alternate realms and alien beings, the scientisation of magical causality, the future of human evolution, and space travel — are shared by this Spiritualist SF, and have continued to be dominant in science fiction to the present day. Few, if any, straight lines can be drawn from *Ghost Land* to either these texts or the broader SF mega-text. However, the novel appears to have been quite popular in Spiritualist and other occult circles — advertisements in *The Banner of Light* two months after the novel's publication already

promoted a third edition.[117] By the 6 October 1877 issue, a paperback version was being advertised, again suggesting that sales had been relatively brisk. We have seen that this occultist popularity continued throughout the century and into the next. Because of this impact, *Ghost Land* remains mega-textually significant as a source text, however fictional, for the ideas and concepts which infused later occult-influenced SF.

This novel masquerading as autobiography also deserves our attention because of the way in which it narratologically anticipates later developments in both occult literature and science fiction. *Ghost Land* is an early member of a significant science fictional corpus in which esoteric religious concepts and traditions distinctly contribute to the narrative elements, themes, and authorial visions of their texts. It is proof that magic need not necessarily function as a rejected other of science fiction, a palette from which a monstrous irrational bogeyman can be painted. Drawing from occultism and Spiritualism — movements that significantly enlarged the space of plausibility between poles of religion and science — early SF texts like *Ghost Land* were able to exploit all the narrative potential of the emerging SF mode without compromising either their religious aims or their dutiful adherence to the cultural and discursive rules of the scientific establishment. Despite its clearly magical and spiritual motivations, the text dialogues with a range of technological and scientific developments of its time. Its technologies of mediumship are particularly clear examples of the need to understand the SF mode as a series of temporally specific narrative evolutions, generated from ideas that may have lost their scientific currency, but were much more relevant — and thus more useful for casting an illusion of scientific verisimilitude — in their own time.

Perhaps more than any other text under examination in this project, *Ghost Land* presents an important challenge to established perspectives of SF. The generic expectations of the SF mode were already in development in Britten's day — we have seen that Bulwer, an author who Britten herself cited as an intellectual and spiritual influence, had already been consciously forming scientific fiction more than a decade earlier. Yet, there was no consensus in these expectations, and little sense of a unified, coherent genre like that following Gernsback. In this more fluid, hybrid context Britten seems to have generated SF incidentally, perhaps emulating the methods of authors like Bulwer. Indeed, Britten is also like Bulwer in that her motivations were different from most later SF authors, who echoed her interest in psychic tropes and alternative realms, but did so because of the exciting narrative opportunities they offer. Any SF author can productively metastasise occult phenomena. Regardless of metaphysical priorities, the enfolding of scientised magical and psychical concepts into fiction helps create an atmosphere of enchantment and

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[117] See, e.g., *Banner of Light*, 6 January 1877, p. 5.

allows new directions in plot, character, theme, and symbol. This science fictional utility has been made possible, however, by occultists and psychical researchers who have connected such concepts to scientific hypothesis, discourse, and naturalisation. Authors like Britten and Bulwer have been particularly important in this regard, as their approach to fiction was motivated by an urge to seriously communicate the scientific possibilities of occultism as they would any other development in science or technology, exploring the ramifications of occult scientific progress for culture, society, and the evolution of the human race. The level of gravity with which Britten applied this fictionalisation of occult science quite outstrips Bulwer, however. She combined fiction with spiritual science with such seriousness that her experience as a trance medium, her occult Spiritualist beliefs, and her role as author blur together, entangling in such a manner that it is perhaps fitting that this melange of art and life is attributed to the equally complex pseudonymous authorship of a shadowy occult Mahatma.

Chapter Four

Marie Corelli's 'Psychic Creed': Authorship and Verisimilitude

'Science serves as an Aladdin's lamp' (*LE*, p. 435)

The earnestness with which authors like Bulwer and Britten deployed occult phenomena could serve to enhance the verisimilitude of their texts. This effect would be most viscerally experienced by readers who believed such authors to possess the higher knowledge of occult science, but authors without any esoteric knowledge or occult involvement could benefit from this narrative potential as well. Marie Corelli (1855–1924), the subject of my third case study, straddles the spectrum between ludic and serious integrations of science fiction and occultism. Corelli, the best-selling author of English language fiction in the late nineteenth century, was not involved, so far as we know, with an occult group, but she turned to esoteric knowledge both to drive the science fictional engines of her stories, and to syncretically structure a unique system of spiritual science. As both an author of enormously popular SF novels and a self-declared prophet, Corelli provides us with a mediative figure whose works provide insight into both types of occult-SF interaction — science fiction written for occultist motivations, and esoteric knowledge deployed for the creative, entertainment-focused purposes of the science fiction author. More importantly, her science fictional texts allow us to explore the space between (and around) these poles. Her fiction offers a useful analytical tool with which to better understand the similarities between a belief-based collision of occultism and science fiction such as Britten's, and a generic, trope-centred adoption of occult concepts and strategies for scientific legitimation.

In this chapter I will analyse the manner in which Corelli generated an SF mode by cannily exploiting the strategies used by both occultists and scientists to establish knowledge. Borrowing concepts from traditions including Spiritualism, Theosophy, mesmerism, and Rosicrucianism, Corelli constructed a unique esoteric system she called her 'psychic' or 'electric' creed. Within her novels, mostly paratextually, she presented this system as knowledge discovered through personal psychic experience, thus legitimating the esoteric concepts and events described in her fiction with a methodology that assumed that the nature of reality could be determined by the experiencing human mind. I will place this methodology, which I call 'occult empiricism', in the context of occult and psychical research in the period, exploring the manner in which Corelli and other authors relied upon it in generating a science fictional challenge to conventional empirical method. I will then explore the manner in which this occult empirical reliance on personal experience and individual testimony opened onto two further areas of intersection for SF and

occultism. In the first, both SF and occultism deployed the alternative methodology of occult empiricism to substantiate disputed realities and psychic powers. In the second, they sought alternative sources of authority in order to compete with the epistemological dominance claimed by established scientists.

Corelli was born Minnie Mackay, the illegitimate daughter of the poet Charles Mackay. She became the best-selling author of her generation, with over thirty romance novels published in dozens of languages. At one point in the late nineteenth century she was outselling Hall Caine, Mary Ward, H.G. Wells, and Arthur Conan Doyle combined.[1] Her work was avidly read by Queen Victoria; William Gladstone and Edward VII were both fans and personal acquaintances. Despite her high volume of sales, Corelli, like Bulwer, suffered a radical decline in popularity from about 1920 forward — probably because of modernist canonisation processes suspicious of 'popular' romances,[2] and, connected to this, probably also because she shared with Bulwer a taste for sentimentality and didacticism that did not transfer well into the post-WWI literary climate.

Research and analysis of Corelli and her work often orients around the possible reasons for this decline. It is also principally interested in the contrast between the general hostility she encountered from cultural elites and her popularity among a fanbase drawn, one reviewer vituperatively surmised, from 'the members of her own sex, in middle-class society, and from the working classes'.[3] Such scorn is clearly rooted in misogyny, but the significant class issues at play here are somewhat more pertinent to understanding the appeal of Corelli's science fiction. Her sales indicate that she seems to have understood better than her peers the preoccupations, anxieties, desires, and dreams of the newly mass-educated readership of the age. Corelli herself believed that she most viscerally connected to what she called 'the million' on a religious and spiritual level (*LE*, p. 21), attributing her success to 'the simple fact that I have always tried to write straight from my own heart to the hearts of others', communicating 'certain theories on religion which I, personally speaking, accept and believe.'[4]

What marks these theories from the orthodox Christianity which Corelli claimed to represent — and what may have appealed most to her readership — is a frequent attempt to harmonise religion and science, rationalising the former and enchanting the latter, usually achieved via

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[1] Federico, p. 6. Reliable biographical sources on Corelli include Federico; Bullock; Ransom. Though he seems to detest his subject, Brian Masters's *Now Barabbas Was a Rotter* is a useful source. In contrast, Thomas F.G. Coates and R.S. Warren Bell's *Marie Corelli* is weakened by a hagiographical approach, though it does have the value of personal contact with the author. For a critical bibliography of biographical sources see Kuehn, 'Eulogiseth Marie', pp. 574–77.

[2] See Davison and Hartnell, p. 183; Felski, p. 117; Ransom, p. 221.

[3] 'Peril', pp. 683. On this contrast in reception see McCann, pp. 103–08, 114; Federico, p. 1; Kuehn, pp. 570–73.

[4] Corelli, '"Romance of Two Worlds"', pp. 206–07. Cf. p. 215.

occult motifs. Corelli's 'psychic creed', formulated mostly within but also outside of her novels, was a syncretic amalgam of Christian, mesmerist, Spiritualist, Theosophical, and Rosicrucian concepts. In addition to reflecting the occultist tendency for individualist syncretism, Corelli also followed occult science in infusing her creed with scientific terminology, an open-ended naturalistic perspective, and a claim to empirical knowledge derived from psychic experience. The result was an SF mode quite similar to that of authors like Bulwer and Britten, but created from a more complex set of motivations. Corelli's science fiction shows the instincts of an entertainer, but also of a prophet. She claimed, in the introduction to her first novel, *A Romance of Two Worlds* (hereafter *Two Worlds*), to be an apostle of the 'electric creed' of Christ (p. 10). The *Quarterly Review* was clear on Corelli's method: '[She] takes equal parts of pseudo-science, Neo-Platonism, and theosophy; stamps the whole as revealed from Heaven; and recommends us to get it down with a deal of sentiment'. This combination was so popular that the periodical's anonymous essayist worried about the epistemological and cultural disorientation that would result from reading the novels of Corelli or her contemporary Hall Caine: 'The millions take them in perfect good faith, cherishing their dreams and delusions as if some reality corresponded with them'.[5]

In Corelli's case, science fiction was sometimes the result of her efforts to acquire the 'good faith' of her readers by asserting an empirical reality behind their dreams of the spiritual and supernatural. The balance of scientific and religious priorities is not always even, but neither is either allowed to emerge dominant, let alone disentangled and in binary opposition to the other. As with Bulwer and Britten, an open-ended naturalism is key to this harmonisation. Thus, for example, while both *Two Worlds* and its 1911 sequel, *The Life Everlasting: A Reality of Romance* (hereafter *Life Everlasting*), operate on the premise that 'Nature can and will unveil to us many mysteries that seem *super*-natural, when they are only manifestations of the deepest centre of the purest natural' (*LE,* p. 7), both novels have a tendency, in their anti-materialism, to find limitations in naturalistic science that can only be solved through spiritual knowledge. 'Science, like everything else, has its borderland,' declares the narrator of *Life Everlasting*. Scientists discover the limitation of their method, she concludes, when 'they forget that in order to understand the Infinite they must first be sure of the Infinite in themselves' (p. 63). Corelli's novels thus have a more prevalent religious tone than most other texts of the period that meld science, fiction, and the occult, but the supernatural and natural still combine to provide the same generative, liminal space found in other texts. There is a 'natural law' in all of Corelli's SF that is equal to 'divine law', which flows from 'the Source of all science'.[6] With divinity and

[5] 'Religious Novels', pp. 336–37.
[6] *SL*, p. 33; *SP*, p. 71.

science thus hazily combined, virtually any seemingly magical but 'perfectly natural' discovery becomes possible,[7] from immortality to astral travel.

Such discoveries rely on the lingering prolepticity on which science fiction thrives. On their way to astonishing revelations regarding the fabric of the universe, Corelli's characters frequently remind us, as does the occult scientist Heliobas in *Two Worlds*, that 'every scientific discovery is voted impossible at the first start' (p. 161). In an interesting didactic aside in *The Soul of Lilith* (hereafter *Lilith*), the authorial voice departs the story for two full pages to directly address an anticipated reaction to the novel by the 'intelligent critic': 'of what avail is it to propound questions that no one can answer?' On these grounds, the narrator predicts, some will reject 'the experiments, researches, and anxieties' of the novel's occult scientist, El-Râmi, who searches for proof of the soul by sending the soul of a young girl on journeys through the galaxy. What these critics do not understand, however, is that El-Râmi's desire 'to prove what appears unprovable' is 'the very key-note and pulse' of this unique period in history:

> Critics look upon this tendency as morbid, unwholesome, and pernicious; but […] the demand for "Light! more light!" is in the very blood and brain of the people […] some of us instinctively feel that we are on the brink of strange discoveries respecting the powers unearthly. (pp. 261–63)

This strange excursus, where literary critics and scientific materialists seem to entirely coalesce, indicates the author's canny awareness of the marketability of the scientifically legitimated supernatural, particularly for a public fascinated by the search of occultists and psychical researchers for empirical explanations for the paranormal. As she wrote to her editor in 1888, 'People appear to revel in and gloat over anything that has to do with an admixture of science and religion.'[8]

Corelli's novels thus rely on many of the same epistemological assumptions and narrative strategies of other science fiction texts of the period. Yet, her fiction occupies a contested place in science fiction's historiography. Corelli scholars have generally been unafraid to connect her work to SF, beginning with early biographer J. Cuming Walters, who felt that she occupied a place between Bulwer and Wells in 'the realm of speculative science'.[9] Some even overstate the case, as in Teresa Ransom's elision of the work of authors from Shelley to Britten in calling Corelli 'the leading, if not the only female exponent [of] semi-scientific writing',[10] or Anne Stiles's feeling that

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[7] *YD*, p. 193.

[8] Marie Corelli to George Bentley, 5 March 1888, Corelli Collection, Beinecke, qtd. in Stiles, *Popular Fiction and Brain Science*, p. 166.

[9] Walters, p. 267. Cf. Federico, p. 2; Kuehn, p. 582.

[10] Ransom, p. 61.

Corelli's talent for scientific prediction rivalled that of Verne and Wells.[11] Such identifications of Corelli with science fiction have tended to focus on *A Romance of Two Worlds*, which is also the novel that has received the most attention — indeed the only real attention — from scholars of SF. Here the situation is more complicated: leading SF critics, including Adam Roberts, Edward James, and Everett Bleiler, include the novel in the SF canon, though as a 'mystical' (Roberts) or 'marginal' (James) member.[12] Other perspectives are much less inclusive: *Two Worlds* functions as an exemplar of fiction that should be removed from the SF sphere by virtue of its 'scraps of esoteric metaphysics' for Suvin, who declares that 'if SF exists at all this is not it'.[13] Paul March-Russel sees *Two Worlds* as an early contributor to science fiction's interest in astral travel, but differentiates between the novel's mesmerist and Theosophical concepts and 'real science',[14] a dichotomy that needlessly obscures *Two Worlds*'s engagement with, and mimesis of, the prolepticity, scientific discursivity, and naturalistic appeal of occult knowledge.

This range of views on the science fictionality of Corelli's texts reflects the novels themselves. They are marked by a generic hybridity, not just between texts, but within each novel. Martin Hipsky argues that this characteristic is the result of quite purposeful steps taken by an author who understood the 'embryonic categories' of popular fiction, but 'clearly wanted to avoid any […] market-based compartmentalizing of her own work.'[15] I would argue, however, that Corelli's fiction experiences shifts in genre at the same time that the ontological or epistemological framework of a particular novel changes. An example of this dynamic is the presentation of astral space travel in three separate novels, two which rely on Spiritualist and Theosophical concepts of a naturalistic spiritual or astral plane that can be accessed through clairvoyant mediumship or astral travel, and one, *Ardath: The Story of a Dead Self* (1899; hereafter *Ardath*), which does not. Alwyn, the hero of this latter novel, attempts to separate his soul from his body by 'superhuman access of will',[16] and quickly finds himself drifting in outer space. He experiences space as abyssal darkness, from which he is only rescued when he asks God to help him. 'Invisible Strength' shines through and he is 'borne aloft' through abstract (pp. 45–46), non-physical spaces until he reaches a dislocated, unspecified grassy woodland where he meets an angelic being with whom he falls in love. Once back on Earth in his physical body, he states a new belief in God, though he had been a firm atheist before his journey. He also denounces science and decries any benefit in astronomical explorations such as the one he had intended. Nothing good can come, he now

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[11] Stiles, *Popular Fiction and Brain Science*, p. 157.

[12] Roberts, *History of Science Fiction*, p. 115; James, 'Science Fiction by Gaslight', p. 31; Bleiler, entries 482–85.

[13] Suvin, 'On What Is and Is Not an SF Narration', p. 50.

[14] March-Russell, p. 171.

[15] Hipsky, p. 108.

[16] Corelli, *Ardath*, p. 35.

insists, of telling people 'that there are eighteen millions of suns in the Milky Way […]. The Soul of Man is destined to live through more than these wonders; […] the millions of planetary systems […] are but the *alpha beta* of the sublime Hereafter which is our natural heritage' (p. 481).

This vision of a Christian heaven that lies outside the natural universe and undermines its ontological significance is quite different from the astronomical system — and the astral method used to discover it — imagined in *Two Worlds* and *Lilith*. In these latter novels the destination of the disembodied soul is a material universe in which extra-terrestrial civilisations populated by both spirit and physical beings can be found. In both novels, mesmerist magicians have developed techniques for freeing the soul from the body. These magicians are also, however, carefully presented as sceptical scientists, capable of separating fact from illusion, and thus appropriately trained to discover the laws of the natural spiritual order. El-Râmi, the magician-scientist of *Lilith*, is also a dyed-in-wool empiricist. His response to unsubstantiated occult theories expressed by other characters is invariable: 'I believe only in what can be proved' (p. 18; cf. p. 126). In his experiments with the soul of Lilith, which he has kept attached to her artificially enlivened body since her death six years prior, he sends her all over the galaxy. In the name of scientific and anthropological observation, she brings back descriptions of undiscovered worlds, 'the scenery and civilization of Mars, the inhabitants of Sirius, the wonders of a myriad of worlds' (p. 189). As in *Ardath*, the galaxy is populated by millions of star systems, but here the soul released from the Earth-bound body can freely travel between them. In place of *Ardath's* lack of interest in extra-planetary worlds and the vast sublimity of space, the stylistics and epistemological structures within which Lilith's astral travel is couched promote an SF mode. This is indicated by the titles of the treatises which El-Râmi develops from these experiments, each of which could be the title of a contemporaneous scientific romance: 'The Inhabitants of Sirius — Their Laws, Customs, and Progress', and 'The World of Neptune — How it is composed of One Thousand Distinct Nations, United Under One Reigning Emperor, Known at the Present Era as Ustalvian the Tenth' (p. 141).

Lilith's genre makeup can thus be differentiated from that of *Ardath* in terms of Corelli's decision to blend spirituality and technoscience in the first novel but not in the second. *Lilith* engages in frequent scientific dialogue, deploys scientific method, and emerges from the proleptic supernatural spaces of occultism. The titles of El-Râmi's treatises even seem to constitute a mega-textual nod to a discursive strategy in which SF authors emulated the long-winded titles that could be attached to scientific treatises, as in Pope's *Journey to Mars the Wonderful World: Its Beauty and Splendor; Its Mighty Races and Kingdom; Its Final Doom*. *Ardath* perpetuates a science/religion dichotomy in which dominant religious motifs suppress the dialogue with scientific frameworks that is one of the core components of science fiction. The distinction between these texts indicates a general trend in Corelli's novels. Where she situates

supernatural events in Christian theology there is usually a corresponding decrease in accompanying scientific justification, though in the messy blur of Theosophical, Christian, Spiritualist, magical, mesmerist, and Rosicrucian influences that pepper her novels there are certainly exceptions to this. Where Corelli's sources seem to be located in occult thought, however, appeals to scientific discursivity or proleptic knowledge are more common.

Indeed, as much as her heterodox religious interests, it may have been Corelli's interest in science that led her toward occultism. Throughout her career she showed a passionate interest in science, corresponding with Oliver Lodge and claiming the friendship of William Crookes,[17] with both of whom she shared a desire to scientifically substantiate occult phenomena. In 1919 she appears to have written to Frank Watson Dyson, Astronomer Royal, wondering whether a coming alignment of the planets would cause earthquakes.[18] It is unclear where she got this idea. Certainly, if her novels are any guide, she lacked the scientific background required to generate new paradigms in physics — as one contemporary critic scornfully put it, 'Miss Corelli's science, like her religion, scorns the fetters of philosophy and fact.'[19] Dyson's rejection of the earthquake theory as 'the purest hypothesis' is indicative of the likely reaction of the scientific establishment to the concepts she imagined both in and outside of fiction.[20] Yet, the combination of her spirit of passionate inquiry and her cavalier approach to established fact was precisely that required for the successful exploitation of hypothesis on which both occultism and science fiction thrive.

As noted, *Two Worlds* is the novel most commonly associated with SF; it is also the most infused with occultist phenomena. The same relationship holds true for *Life Everlasting*, and for Corelli's last two science fiction novels, *The Young Diana* (1917) and *The Secret Power* (1921), in which she returns to the occult forces and scientist-masters that contributed to the success of *Two Worlds*. *Young Diana* begins in the style of a conventional society novel without hint of an SF mode. 130 pages in, however, the eponymous heroine walks into the laboratory of Dimitrius, an occult scientist seeking to distil the elixir of life from light and radium via a machine driven by perpetual motion. Dimitrius recruits Diana as his test subject in a mad scientist quest to discover the secret of immortality. Dimitrius, like El-Râmi before him, has much of Victor Frankenstein about him, and indeed the novel generates a science fictional feel and thematic approach similar to Shelley's text from this point forward. Corelli's last SF novel is the one most clearly aligned with the generic expectations of twentieth- and twenty-first-century SF. *The Secret Power*

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[17] See Stiles, *Popular Fiction and Brain Science*, p. 169.

[18] F.W. Dyson to Marie Corelli, 1 December 1919, SBTA DR777/87. It is unclear whether this was Corelli's own theory or something she had encountered elsewhere, as only Dyson's reply to Corelli survives.

[19] 'Religious Novels', p. 308.

[20] Dyson to Corelli, 1 December 1919.

focuses on flying machines rather than flying souls. Working independently, two globally renowned scientists, Morgana and Roger, discover a new occult force; Morgana looks to use it for positive purposes, such as powering her airship. Roger seeks progress through other means, taking on the mad scientist mantle of Dimitrius as he invents a radioactive weapon eerily similar to the atomic bomb and attempts to wield its power politically as a threat to any nation who initiates war. The novel's updated tropes and situations indicate that Corelli had been reading contemporary SF authors like Wells. Yet, though *Secret Power*, *Life Everlasting*, and *Young Diana* are novels of the twentieth century, in many ways they reproduce the form and tropes more common to nineteenth-century occult SF.

Corelli seems to have been reluctant to adapt to changing genre trends later in her life. Her opinion of the shift away from the hybrid, Romantic SF she helped to make popular toward more exclusively positivist and mechanistic fantasies is probably reflected in her description of Wells's stories as an 'effort of imagination under hydraulic pressure'.[21] Her later science fiction indicates that the genre's increasing insistence on empiricist structures and mechanical innovation fit poorly with the religious priorities behind her open-ended naturalism and distaste for materialism. The lack of success of these later texts is indicative of the fact that her novels did not ripen well in the face of changes in both mainstream literary criteria and the preferences of science fiction readers. Yet, though she had a unique set of priorities formed in an episteme quite different from the post-war environment in which she published *Secret Power*, her approach was consanguineous with other science fiction of the Victorian and Edwardian eras. Her popularity in this period indicates that she understood how to imagine beyond the borders of perceptible reality in a way that struck a chord with the reading public that few SF authors have managed to reproduce.

Fiction and experience: Corelli's 'psychic creed'

As with the other authors of occult-infused SF I have discussed, one of the most culturally significant aspects of Corelli's fiction is its complex relationship with the development of 'real-world' knowledge. Corelli's novels constitute nodal points that mediated esoteric knowledge both ancient and modern to an often-receptive readership otherwise unfamiliar with occult concepts and symbolism. This translation of occultism had the power to metamorphose 'true' knowledge claims to fictional novums and vice versa. In this environment, an author like Corelli,

[21] Corelli, *Innocent*, p. 243.

with a keen understanding of how to blend entertainment with proselytic doctrine, could productively package knowledge as both.

We can gain important insight into such fictionalisation of occult science by taking a closer look at the way Corelli represented and legitimated her 'psychic' or 'electric' creed, a concept which she developed over the course of several novels in the thirty-five-year period between *Two Worlds* and *Secret Power.* Many of the core elements of the creed are established from the beginning in *Two Worlds*, where the central novum is a physico-spiritual fluid called 'human electricity' or 'the electric principle' (p. 37). This fluid is not, as some have argued,[22] a spiritual rather than physical element — it is both. The difference between human electricity and the stuff of the physical world is a matter of gradation. The electric fluid is formed of extremely subtle matter, which Corelli explicitly described as 'etherical' in *Life Everlasting* (p. 16); it thus constitutes a fluidic occult novum similar to Bulwer's vril or Britten's force. An anonymous 'Electric Woman'[23] of *Two Worlds* is treated with a healing elixir presumably distilled from this substance, and thus recovers from an unspecified nervous illness. She seeks this treatment from Heliobas, a Chaldean monk of the Bulwerian tradition, an occult scientist whose knowledge is formed from a combination of ancient Chaldean and Egyptian wisdom and technology, modern Rosicrucian secrets, and cutting-edge electrical physics. From this knowledge base, Heliobas has made a number of discoveries, from electric doorbells to astral projection. Similar to El-Râmi, Heliobas is able to facilitate this latter ability for other people as well. Via the electric fluid, he exerts his will onto the astral double of the Electric Woman and sends her into outer space, a material realm overlaid with etheric spirit beings and realms, as commonly found in Spiritualism and Theosophy. At the conclusion of this journey, on which she also observes several extra-planetary civilisations, the Electric Woman envisions an enormous star at the centre of the universe from which the galaxies, stars, planets, and beings of the universe constantly emanate. This star is equivalent to God, who is thus in turn synonymous with the electric principle that radiates from the star's spirito-physical presence, suffusing and enlivening all matter.

Though Corelli's spiritual science is still most commonly referred to as her 'electric creed', in *Life Everlasting* she recast the fluid as 'psychic' rather than electric. Indeed, the term 'psychic' more accurately represents the ongoing study of the qualities of the soul, the magical potential of the mind, and the superhuman latency of the human and its future evolutionary forms that is ongoing in Corelli's science fiction, even in *Two Worlds*. Between the two novels, the psychic creed experienced a technoscientific upgrade. The prologue of *Life Everlasting* announces that

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[22] Siebers, p. 203; Stiles, *Popular Fiction and Brain Science*, p. 22.

[23] So named by Christine Ferguson in 'Zanoni's Daughters: *Fin de Siècle* Fictions of Female Initiation' (forthcoming), np.

what was presented as electricity in *Two Worlds* was radium all along.[24] Corelli claimed to have been taught about radium and its spiritual properties by an unnamed group of occult masters shortly before writing *Two Worlds*, but to have been sworn to secrecy and thereby forced to refer to the occult force of radium in terms of electricity instead (p. 15). Here we see the science fictional exploitation of prolepticity taken to its maximum extent — Corelli creates a hypothetical knowledge space *in the past* in order to reframe a previous work of fiction as even more prophetically scientific.

Aside from the switch to radium, Corelli's cosmic formulation remained largely the same. The electric fluid emanating from the central ring, which had in the meantime appeared in *Lilith* as the 'Central Universe' (p. 58), is now 'the Radiant outflow of the Mind of God […] the *life* of the Universe' (*LE*, p. 33). *Life Everlasting* equates this 'eternal radio-activity' with soul and spirit (p. 15). This extension ensures the complete unification of science and religion, as 'there is nothing which can properly be called *super*-natural, or above Nature, inasmuch as this Eternal Spirit of Energy is in and throughout *all* Nature' (p. 30). *Life Everlasting* produces several technological novums from this concept of divine radioactivity, but the novel is most centrally concerned with the spiritual development of the Electric Woman, and is sporadically science fictional in a manner similar to *Young Diana*.

The renovation of the electric principle along radioactive lines is repeated in this latter novel, where Dimitrius distils radiant energy into an elixir that provides beauty and immortality,[25] and *Secret Power*, in which Morgana and Roger have tapped into 'the Force that is Everything' (p. 137), a source of perpetual clean energy that emanates from the 'Divine' and is equivalent to it. This cosmotheistic energy source powers Morgana's airship. On its own the ship is 'a piece of mechanism' (p. 93), but once powered by two cylinders filled with an 'emanation of Nature's greatest force' it becomes capable of high atmospheric flight (p. 84). It is not until this last SF novel that Corelli truly takes the time to imagine the visual manifestation of her psychic force — the effect anticipates later science fictional renderings of future technologies, particularly in film and television. As Morgana inserts the cylinders into specially prepared chambers, 'fine, sharp, needlelike flashes of light' break from them, 'filling the whole receptacle with vibrating rays'. These rays connect via small metal disks that line the entirety of the ship, so that 'light runs all around the interior of the vessel, transmitting from disc to disc' (p. 89). The force thus generated

[24] *LE*, p. 15. For an intriguing analysis of the motivations behind the switch to radium, see Stiles, *Popular Fiction and Brain Science*, pp. 180–81.

[25] See, e.g., *YD*, pp. 168, 172, 230. Corelli appears to have either confused, or purposefully conflated, radioactivity with radiant energy.

're-creates itself as it works' (p. 91). Corelli's hero has thus discovered infinitely renewable spiritual energy.

By applying a strong, developed will to the psychic force that pulsates within, magician-scientists like Heliobas, El-Râmi, Dimitrius, Morgana, and the 'Electric Woman' become capable of a range of magical abilities that, placed within an occult scientific framework, acquire a science fictional combination of verisimilitude and wonder. Heliobas, in particular, has 'cultivated the electricity in his own system' so that he is now a 'physical electrician' (p. 79), capable of magical healing, the extension of lifespan, mind control, telepathy, and the ability to 'converse with angels' (p. 12). The Electric Woman is also a psychic adept by the end of *Two Worlds* and goes on to further develop in *Life Everlasting*. Rafael Santoris, another occult scientist and the Electric Woman's romantic object in this latter novel, can deploy the power of spiritual radium to defend himself against all enemies 'without lifting a hand' (p. 242). Through his magico-scientific control of the 'threads that connect Spirit with Matter' (*SL*, p. 74), El-Râmi keeps the soul of Lilith alive through necromancy. These powers might seem to be the supernatural feats of the gothic magus, but Corelli obscures their magical heritage. After teaching the Electric Woman to exert her will upon matter in a way that enables telekinesis, another occult scientist adept assures her that while this power would 'be called "miraculous" by the ignorant' it is 'nothing more than the physical force of the magnetic light-rays within you' activated by the will (*LE*, p. 414). The adepts of *Life Everlasting* are not magicians but atomic physicists who can 'control both […] matter and spirit' simply by 'a shifting and re-investiture of imperishable atoms' (p. 313). Characteristically, Corelli is not entirely consistent with this obscuration of magic. The Electric Woman refers to her mind control of a medical doctor she dislikes as a 'spell' (*LE*, p. 99); Diana calls Dimitrius a magician (p. 286. Cf. p. 136). In general though, the words of Santoris apply to the self-conception of most of Corelli's magicians: 'There is no mystery about it — no "black magic," or "occultism" of any kind. I have done nothing since I left college but adapt myself to the forces of Nature. […] The same way of life is open to all — and the same results are bound to follow' (*LE*, p. 234). The magical roots of this formula for long life, eternal beauty, and superhuman power are thus productively obscured by mimicking the discourses and polemics of naturalistic and empiricist science. The psychic force of Santoris, Heliobas, and the Electric Woman is empirically verifiable and exploitable by anyone able to discover it.

Corelli scholars have tended to emphasise the visionary creativity of this psychic creed. Masters finds *Two Worlds* 'original and bizarrely imaginative';[26] Federico describes her 'creed of electric religion' as 'ahead of her time';[27] and Ransom argues that in making use of electricity in

[26] Masters, p. 52.
[27] Federico, p. 160.

Two Worlds, Corelli exploited a technology that 'was still something of a novelty'.[28] It may be fair to attribute such originality to much earlier works like *Frankenstein*, where electricity has a similar, though significantly more ghoulish, vitalist effect, but Corelli was certainly wandering worn paths by 1886. Franklin had already flown a kite into a lightning bolt over a hundred years earlier, Faraday had made in important discoveries in electromagnetism in the 1830s and 1840s, furthered by James Clerk Maxwell and Hermann von Helmholtz in the 1860s. The new force had produced reality-shifting technological change in the 1840s with the invention of the wireless telegraph; Edison's lightbulb was already six years old by the time of *Two Worlds*'s publication. By the late nineteenth century electrical technologies still seemed half-magical and futuristic, but Corelli was hardly ahead of her time.

More significantly, Corelli's use of electricity to develop a cosmic spiritual physics is not all that original either. Her occult fluid is situated in an even older discourse that dates at least to the seventeenth-century work of Athanasius Kircher, who, as an extension of his scientific exploration of the nature of magnetism, concluded that God was not an individual deity, but an emanating, pervasive force that gives life and form to all things.[29] From this and other early modern theories, including the mystical cosmology of Jacob Boehme, a 'theology of electricity' arose in the context of German Pietism in the mid-eighteenth century, led by Friedrich Christoph Oetinger, a natural philosopher who proposed that God infused creation with 'electrical fire' at the moment of creation, described in Genesis as the light that spreads over chaos on the first day. As in Corelli's psychic creed, this force is equivalent to soul.[30] In general, electricity has been readily associated, as Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke identifies, with an 'ensouling, animating force in esoteric cosmology'.[31] As we have seen in the examples of Bulwer and Britten, mesmerists and Spiritualists of the nineteenth century also followed this logic, connecting electricity — often seen as synonymous with, or extending from, the universal ether — with a variety of forces that had both spiritual and material effects, sometimes as a result of their divine substance. As Sam Halliday observes, this was a typical discursive function of electricity in the nineteenth century: it did not just literally transfer as energy between particular poles; it also mediated between 'oppositions such as life and death, matter and spirit, physical and metaphysical […] and functioned as a sign for paradoxical amalgams in each instance.'[32]

Adaptations of electrical theory were not the only contributions of occultism to Corelli's psychic creed. As Suvin observes, Corelli's spiritual electricity has something of Bulwer's vril

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[28] Ransom; Stiles, *Popular Fiction and Brain Science*, p. 163ff.
[29] Goodrick-Clarke, 'Esoteric Uses of Electricity', pp. 69–70.
[30] Benz, pp. 46, 51. Cf. Goodrick-Clarke, 'Esoteric Uses of Electricity', pp. 70–73.
[31] Goodrick-Clarke, 'Esoteric Uses of Electricity', p. 87.
[32] Halliday, pp. 5–6.

about it.[33] Such fictional presentations of etheric forces and substances and the scientised magical powers made possible by them are important intertextual influences, many of which could have ferried occult concepts into Corelli's fiction. The psychic creed, and the fluid on which it relies, are the result of a much broader web of ideas than vril, however. It is more accurate to see them as the product of an inextricable tangle of concepts dislocated from physics, astronomy, theology, mesmerism, Spiritualism, Theosophy, and Rosicrucianism. Mesmerism is the most prominent among these. Despite Heliobas's frequent claims that in his powers 'there is neither mesmerism nor magnetism' (*ROTW*, p. 95), there is little to separate Corelli's 'human electricity' from the magical mesmerism that arose in the wake of Puységur and the magnetisers of Lyon, or, indeed, from the physical mesmerism more indicative of the theories of Mesmer himself. Heliobas cures 'by means of electricity' (*ROTW*, p. 80), using baths charged with electricity in the same way that Mesmer's baquets were saturated with animal magnetism (p. 98). Another method involves visual fixation, followed by a prolonged exertion of will by Heliobas upon his subject (e.g. p. 157). He uses similar techniques to cast acolytes into a somnambular state (e.g. p. 76). Just as fluidic mesmerists were able to exert control over the minds and bodies of others because of a better balance or higher volume of the animal magnetic fluid, practitioners of human electricity are required to have a higher strength of internal electricity than their subjects (p. 141).

As discussed further in Chapter Five in terms of occultism's influence on science fiction's representations of space travel, the immanent cosmology of the psychic creed and the expansive astral travel with which it is discovered are also firmly rooted in esotericism. Sarah Willburn describes the astral travel of *Two Worlds* as an original and 'striking' reworking of the concept of space, 'making it an imaginary construction only reachable through somatic capability',[34] but, in addition to the fact that Corelli was very likely motivated by other fictional presentations of astral travel,[35] the experience of the Electric Woman represents a variety of similar experiences reported by mediums working in Spiritualist and Theosophical contexts. Her soul separation is triggered by mesmeric trance, her traversal of 'the unseen world' (p. 151) is situated in a Spiritualist cosmology adapted from Swedenborgianism and the visions of Andrew Jackson Davis. Theosophy, dedicated to experimenting with the astral double from the founding of the first Theosophical Society in 1875,[36] is also a likely influence here, particularly since Theosophists had

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[33] Suvin, 'What Is and Is Not an SF Narration', p. 50.

[34] Willburn, p. 140. Robyn Hallim includes an extensive comparison of the 'Electric Creed' of *Two Worlds* with Spiritualism in her dissertation, 'Marie Corelli: Science, Society and the Best Seller', pp. 101–02, 106–14. Hallim's analysis overemphasises the role of Spiritualism, however, as it does not consider any other contributing esoteric currents.

[35] See pp. 209–10.

[36] Deveney, *Paschal Beverly Randolph*, pp. 295–96.

recently begun publishing extensive explanations for the phenomenon, such as Alfred Percy Sinnett's *Esoteric Buddhism*, published in 1883. Astral travel and the electric medium that powers psychical, magical, and spiritual events are also situated in esoteric thought of the period in that they are presented as modern adaptations of ancient knowledge. As already described in Chapter Two, inventions from Heliobas's electric doorbells to Dimitrius's distillation of the elixir of life from radium are presented as futuristic technologies born from the nexus of ancient knowledge and modern techno-industrial innovation (*ROTW*, p. 96; *YD*, p. 163).

Thus, typical of both the syncretism of occultism and the techno-creativity of the science fiction writer, Corelli cast a wide net in constructing the psychic creed and the various occult scientific elements enabled by it. Her novels frequently describe the creed as a form of individualist, mystical, Christian expression, and they also dialogue with technological and scientific advancements in energy physics, but the psychic creed is most clearly oriented toward occult science, particularly concepts generated by mesmerists and adapted into newer traditions like Spiritualism and Theosophy. Yet, the characters within the novels and the authorial voice in Corelli's prologues make a significant effort to reject the occultist origins of the creed.[37] As J. Jeffrey Franklin notes in the course of assessing connections between what he calls Corelli's 'hybrid Christianity' and Buddhism, Corelli's creed 'stakes-out its own brand of spirituality by strategically incorporating elements drawn from the very sources that it demonizes: fundamentalist Christianity, market capitalism, science, spiritualism, and Buddhism.'[38] Heliobas, the most vocal defender of the creed, argues a complete dichotomy between the 'established scientific fact' of the creed and 'vulgar spirit-rapping and mesmerism' (p. 63), and, reappearing in *Ardath*, rejects magic on the same grounds (p. 15). El-Râmi is assigned to attack Theosophy, denouncing 'the believers in the "Mahatmas"' (p. 166) as credulous rather than truth-seeking: 'The Theosophical business is a piece of vulgar imposture, in which the professors themselves are willing to delude their own imaginations as well as the imaginations of others.'[39]

Such denunciations in fiction mirror Corelli's stated position in other forums. In a 1907 letter to Oliver Lodge she declared, apparently having been accused of Theosophical leanings, that she was '*not a Theosophist* and ha[d] never had anything to do with any person or persons belonging to any sect under that denomination'.[40] Spiritualism received even more of Corelli's ire, with its mediums rejected as frauds and charlatans, or, even if legitimate, panned as producing evidence

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[37] See, e.g., *ROTW*, p. 9; *LE*, p. 25.

[38] Franklin, 'The Counter-Invasion of Britain', p. 30.

[39] *SL*, pp. 166, 235; Cf. *LE*, p. 25.

[40] Marie Corelli to Oliver Lodge, 31 December 1907, University of Birmingham library, Corelli-Lodge Correspondence, qtd. in Kuehn, *Glorious Vulgarity*, p. 210n90.

too trivial to be of use.[41] She wrote two unpublished essays ostensibly intended to denounce the movement (though both spend more time attacking the clergy): '"Spiritualism" Versus the Church', written sometime during WWI, and 'Deceiving the Very Elect; a Comment on "Spiritualism"', written sometime after 1918.[42] In a 1904 interview with Herbert Vivian for *Pall Mall*, Corelli rejected the interviewer's characterisation of her as 'an apostle of mysticism': 'What people call mysticism, or at any rate the true part of it, is merely a name for some natural law.' She proceeded to list recent scientific discoveries, such as the Roentgen ray, that she felt were updated scientific explanations for what used to be called magic. 'Yes,' said Vivian, 'But now you are not denying mysticism; you are explaining it. Every occultist would admit natural or preternatural laws.'[43]

Vivian's observation encapsulates much of the contradictory and paradoxical nature of Corelli's stance toward occultism. Regardless of the intensity of her denials, it is clear that she found occult concepts palatable enough to enfold them into the psychic creed. What then was her motivation in denying the esoteric aspects of her ideas? One possible explanation is that she really did loathe movements like Spiritualism, and absorbed most of her occult knowledge from fiction or from reading articles from sympathetic scientists like Lodge (though Lodge too was the subject of her anti-Spiritualist ire[44]). She may also have been reluctant to be associated with the rejectedness of occult knowledge — its reputation as irrational and fraudulent from the point of view of science, or its deviancy in the orthodox Christian perspective. For both Corelli the prophet and Corelli the canny author of popular fiction, the reputation of movements like Spiritualism and Theosophy would have been a concern. Most of all, however, the evidence suggests that the rejection of occultism was part of Corelli's half-serious presentation of herself as a prophet of the psychic creed. Such messianic figures generally rehash old materials, but few gather followers by admitting they have done so. Indeed, in addition to separating her creed, both in and outside of her fiction, from pre-existing traditions, Corelli also frequently claimed that its facts and principles had been gathered through personal psychic experience.

This claim appears with the first presentation of the psychic creed, in a short prologue appended to *Two Worlds* which describes the novel as a 'narration of the events I have recently experienced' (p. 16). The narratorial voice of the Electric Woman — and, by extension, the substantiation of the electric creed — are thus conflated with Corelli's own claim to actual occult

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[41] Corelli, *Is All Well with England?*, p. 17.

[42] Both essays are undated, but it is clear from '"Spiritualism" versus the Church' (SBTA DR777/35) that WWI is ongoing. 'Deceiving the Very Elect' (SBTA DR777/41) contains a reference to *Young Diana*, published in 1918, and alludes to the first essay.

[43] Vivian, p. 500.

[44] See Corelli, 'Deceiving the Very Elect', p. 7; *LE* prologue, pp. 29–30.

knowledge and experience. In the first edition of *Two Worlds*, however, authentication of the creed is mostly left to the authority of Heliobas, which the 'readers can accept or deny […] as they please' (p. 310). By the 1887 second edition of the novel, however, Corelli seems to have grown more attached to her creed, as she added a long introduction that elaborates on its precepts, distances it from occultism**,** and places herself as prophet at its centre. Hallim theorises that Corelli's increased personal identification with the creed may have been motivated by a rush of enthusiastic fan mail.[45] Indeed, Corelli also added an appendix to the second edition with ten 'genuine epistles' illustrating the passion of her readers for her new religion. Each letter also allows further opportunity to wax eloquent on aspects of the electric creed in reply.

The prologue of *Life Everlasting* takes a similar tack in attempting to legitimate the updated psychic creed. Here Corelli as prefatory authorial voice explains that her psychic fiction was not written solely for money or entertainment, but in order to communicate her vitally important spiritual science, 'the outcome of what I myself have learned, practised and proved in the daily experiences, both small and great, of daily life' (p. 29). The psychic creed is now described as the culmination of a seven novel project beginning with *Two Worlds* and running through *Ardath*, *Lilith*, *Barabbas* (1893)*, The Sorrows of Satan* (1895), and *The Master Christian* (1900) (p. 26). This claim to have begun *Two Worlds* with a 'clear intention' for carrying out this ambitious project over twenty-five years is unlikely. As Ralph Shirley, editor of the *Occult Review*, wryly observed, 'Certainly the general public never realized this sequence'.[46] The seven novels certainly have thematic similarities, but they are hardly bound, as Corelli claimed, by 'one theory'. A similar claim made in an unpublished essay called 'Deceiving the Very Elect' is more congruous with the actual content of her novels. Here Corelli claims the right to critique Spiritualism because of her own superior psychic knowledge, dedicating herself 'from the earliest days of my consciousness of thought […] to the study of what I may call *Psychic Science*.' She then lists *Two Worlds*, *Life Everlasting*, and *Young Diana* in a trifecta of novels in which she has attempted to communicate 'the wonders which *are* possible, and also what is *not* possible in the psychic or "spiritual" world.'[47] It is very likely, given its thematic similarities and interest in the applications of the etheric fluid described by the psychic creed, that *Secret Power* was written with a similar purpose in mind.

Corelli thus buttressed her fiction with claims to personal knowledge and experience, projecting an author-based verisimilitude into her novels via the transitional function of 'paratext', a term introduced by Gérard Genette to conceptualise elements of a literary work

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[45] Hallim, p. 100.
[46] Shirley, p. 296.
[47] Corelli, 'Deceiving the Very Elect', pp. 9–10.

which provide additional interpretative framing for the reader. Paratext is constituted of 'peritext' — prologues, titles, notes, book binding methods, and other aspects of publication that directly influence a text's reception — and more distant elements of 'epitext', such as interviews and other texts by the same author, that may or may not reach the reader but would have a significant impact if they did.[48] It will be productive to assess the purpose and effect of Corelli's paratextual authorship strategies before we move on to discuss the ways in which her claims to occult experience, mostly made in this liminal authorial space, represent an occult empiricist approach to establishing verisimilitude in science fiction.

Genette emphasises paratext as a point of transition between the realities of author, reader, and text. Paratext 'constitutes a zone between text and off-text, a zone not only of transition but also of *transaction*: a privileged place of a pragmatics and a strategy, of an influence on the public [in] service of a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it'.[49] In Corelli's case, this 'better reception' must be read multidimensionally. Her paratextual efforts were designed to ensure that the reader properly filtered the psychic creed through fiction, but they were also intended to construct a reciprocal relationship between author and fiction. This relationship served to uphold the empirical reality of the tenets of the psychic creed, but it also projected the fantastic events of fiction onto the 'Marie Corelli' perceived by the reading public and presented by the author herself. The most evident example of this process is Minnie Mackay's decision, after several failed publication endeavours under her own name, to take on the mantle of 'Marie Corelli' in 1883, along with a mythical genealogy and personal history to match. *Two Worlds* was thus received not as a slapdash confection of occultism and romance thrown together by the illegitimate daughter of a minor poet, but as a sublime snapshot of the mind-state of a young Venetian descendant of the Baroque composer Arcangelo Corelli.[50] Going forward, Corelli continued to add layers to this construction of a fictionalised authorial identity. She consistently claimed to be ten years younger than she actually was;[51] she tightly restricted opportunities for photographs and when these *were* taken she had them extensively edited to make herself look younger. As Teresa Ransom observes, Corelli's 'greatest work of fiction was her own life.'[52] These strategies were supplemented by Corelli's less-than-nuanced association of herself with the beautiful, intelligent young authors or scientist-philosophers that populate her novels, from Irene Vassilius of *Lilith* to Morgana.[53]

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[48] See Genette, esp. pp. 1–15.
[49] Ibid. p. 2.
[50] On Corelli's name change see Masters, p. 47; Ransom, pp. 20–24.
[51] Federico, p. 5.
[52] Ransom, p. 1. Cf. Federico, p. 6.
[53] See Bullock, pp. 8–9; Ransom, p. 31.

The claims to occult experience on which the psychic creed is based have to be considered in this strange half-light of real fiction and fictionalised reality. Corelli made a variety of paratextual appeals to experience in insisting on the veracity of the psychic creed. In the *Life Everlasting* prologue, she described the creed as the result of private study and 'initiation' guided by undisclosed occult masters who are represented in the character of Heliobas (p. 12). Elsewhere, however, personal gnosis is the central source of the creed. In *Lilith* this was the result of 'a strange and daring experiment once actually attempted', a claim to occult scientific exploration connected to a series of similar statements made in prologues to *Two Worlds* and *Life Everlasting*.[54] In the latter, she noted that the 'strange psychical experience' occurred when she was near death.[55] Corelli supported the connection between fiction and experience in an epitextual account of the writing of *Two Worlds*, where she described it as 'the simply worded narration of a singular psychical experience'.[56] More widely, she frequently declared her representation of her experiences and the creed that came from them to be in earnest, both in her prologues and in a variety of interviews and letters.[57] As she told a fan in 1900: 'All my work is written from the depths of an honest conviction, and with a careful and conscientious study and knowledge of the facts I write about. These facts may be denied or "scoffed at" — but if they were not true I should not use them.'[58]

Despite such assurances of veracity, however, Corelli never truly elaborated on the nature of this experience outside of material either directly or paratextually related to her novels. It is difficult to determine which of the events or discoveries of occult knowledge which occur in her novels are to be seen as outgrowths of the author's own life, or indeed if any such events occurred at all. There is a similar absence when it comes to the psychic creed. Corelli did not hesitate to express strident views on religious subjects in interviews and essays — her disgust with the Church and its clergy, her distaste for Spiritualism, and her worry about the general spiritual health of the English are all common subjects in essays like 'A Question of Faith' and 'The Soul of the Nation'.[59] Yet, she did not refer to either the electric or psychic creed in such non-fiction forums, which suggests that while the creed was certainly based on actual beliefs such as her conviction in the eternality of the soul, her rejection of materialism, and her belief

[54] See, e.g., *LE*, pp. 12, 27; *ROTW*, p. 443.

[55] It is unclear when such an experience would have occurred. According to an 1898 feature in the *Strand*, Corelli had recently had an operation during which she was 'veritably at "death's door"', but this was long after *Two Worlds*. See Lawrence, p. 18.

[56] Corelli, '"Romance of Two Worlds"', p. 207.

[57] E.g. *ROTW*, p. 3; *LE*, p. 38; '"Romance of Two Worlds"', pp. 206–07.

[58] Letter to an unnamed correspondent, 9 November 1900, SBTA DR118/1.

[59] Corelli, *Free Opinions*, pp. 38–67, 340–53.

that the essence of religious discovery lay in science, the psychic creed remained a fictional imagination of a spiritual scientific system consistent with these core beliefs.

This contrast is visible in Corelli's public statement of belief that comes closest to the psychic creed, a lecture called 'The Life Everlasting' given to the Theosophical Society at Leeds on 8 October 1915. Her usual bluster against Spiritualists and Theosophists is, as might be expected, quite absent from the written version of her lecture. Otherwise, however, she followed the plot of her essays on religion, accusing modern Christianity of various failures to realise the true nature of God and soul and then spending what seems likely to have been over an hour illustrating her own spiritual system. Many of the elements of the psychic creed are there: a theory of the development of soul justified by a nod to scientific theories of evolution and the first law of thermodynamics (pp. 9, 23); a description of the soul as 'a radiant cell of eternal and indestructible Energy, emanating directly from God' (pp. 8–9); an emphasis on the ability of the will to operate on the radiant soul-matter in order to further its development (p. 23); and the alignment of these elements with a theory of reincarnation similar to Theosophical ideas on the subject. Yet, there is no mention of the electric or psychic creeds, no reference to personal psychical experience, no claim to have discovered radium, no description of initiation under occult masters — all subjects in which Theosophists would have been much interested.

The lecture to the Theosophical Society may thus provide as reliable a source as we are going to get as to the core of Corelli's religious system. Like the psychic creed, this was heterodox and clearly influenced by contemporary esoteric movements. Corelli's acceptance of this speaking engagement also indicates an element of fictionalisation in her ongoing public rejection of Theosophy. There is evidence of a similar contrast between her paratextual rejections of occultism and her actual stance toward the phenomena explored in currents like mesmerism and Spiritualism. She turned down an invitation to write a leader on any aspect of 'Metaphysics, Theosophy, Mental Science, Christian Healing […] Telepathy, Occultism, etc.' for an issue of the short-lived *Wings of Truth* periodical (1900–1903), but the editor noted that she had expressed 'the greatest possible sympathy with the proposed journal' in her letter of apology.[60] This sort of sympathy may have prompted her to choose *The Star of the Magi*, an occultist periodical published by the Order of Oriental Magi, as the venue for publication of an open letter critical of Cardinal Vaughan's interdiction of Catholic scientist St. George Mivart.[61]

There is thus a clear disconnect between the events and subject matter of Corelli's novels and her own life and beliefs. On the face of it this is altogether unremarkable — it is common to learn virtually nothing reliable about a writer through their fiction, and literary works are not

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[60] Stiles, 'Editor's Straight Talk', p. 1.
[61] Corelli, 'Open Letter to Cardinal Vaughan'.

necessarily better interpreted with knowledge of authorial context. Via the transitional space of paratext, however, Corelli transformed both her life and her fiction, positioning banks of mirrors that reflect the elements of one into the other. Were the Electric Woman only presented within the narrative of *Two Worlds* and *Life Everlasting*, connections might still be drawn between her and her author, but the sense of the novel as autobiographical would likely not be assumed. Similarly, without paratextual claims to have received esoteric knowledge through secret channels and/or the scientised gnosis of nineteenth-century occult mediumship, the psychic creed would be just another act of science fictional worlding — a spirito-physical novum that establishes logical consistency for the occult fantasies of several novels.

Corelli's paratextual attribution of verisimilitude to her fiction was startlingly successful. Many of her readers accepted the connection between life and fiction at face value. Esoteric thinkers and practitioners exemplified this phenomenon. Many drew a straight line between Corelli and her novels and found in her someone who, in the words of the *Theosophic Messenger*, 'has had some occult training' and 'is evidently somewhat past the ordinary stage of evolution' — though the *Messenger* could not understand why she would take an 'unkind fling' at believers like Theosophists, 'with whom she has so much in common.'[62] Corelli's novels were recommended to readers or appeared frequently on the selling lists of occultist periodicals including *The Light of Truth*, *The Sunflower*, *The Occult Review*, and *The All-Seeing Eye*.[63] Her claims to initiation, combined with a number of opaque references to Rosicrucianism via the 'Order of the Cross and Star' described in *Two Worlds* and *Life Everlasting*, prompted leading Rosicrucians to identify her as one of their own. H. Spencer Lewis, founder of the Ancient and Mystical Order Rosae Crucis (AMORC), an order founded in America which now has chapters all over the globe, placed Corelli with Bulwer in terms of influence on modern Rosicrucians, and invented an initiatic biography for her.[64] R. Swinburne Clymer, a Grand Master of P.B. Randolph's Rosicrucian order, included Corelli in a vast hierarchy of previous adepts, enlisting her as a disciple of a 'Count Giounotti', a supposed 'Supreme Hierarch' of the order.[65] Though she rejected the value of occultist movements like Spiritualism and Theosophy, the adherents of these traditions were an ideal readership for Corelli's paratextual efforts to establish verisimilitude by appealing to initiation and gnosis. These readers approached her novels with a ready instinct to interpret fiction as a source of ontology, to adopt elements of the psychic creed

[62] 'C.H.', p. 619.

[63] See, e.g., *Light of Truth*, 3 December 1892, p. 7; *Sunflower*, 9 April 1904, p. 1; *Occult Review*, December 1911, pp. 295–301; *All-Seeing Eye*, January 26, 1927, p. 4.

[64] Lewis, pp. 176–80.

[65] Clymer, p. 8. On the Giounotti myth, see Deveney, *Paschal Beverly Randolph*, p. 142.

into syncretic personal belief systems or, more commonly, to find in it confirmation of existing belief.

Others who encountered Corelli's claims, however, were likely to be more of a mind with a review of *Two Worlds* which found the novel tolerable enough as a romance, but groused that 'if the writer intends us to take it seriously — as her preface seems half to suggest — it is pure bosh.'[66] Similarly, the *Athenaeum* felt compelled 'to accept Marie Corelli and her story in good faith, as not being consciously deceptive or misleading', but the reviewer could not, then, understand why Corelli had called her work a romance, if she believed 'in the nonsense on which her incidents turn'.[67] An anonymous essayist writing in the *Quarterly Review* was dumbfounded at the success of Corelli's paratextual claims:

> When Miss Corelli assures her correspondents that she knows the Electrical Creed to be a matter of experience, what are we to think? Has a single one of her acquaintance penetrated to the Central Planet? Or beheld the nations in Saturn and Jupiter? The amazing fact is that any reader should have taken *A Romance of Two Worlds* seriously.[68]

What is perhaps even more amazing, however, is that these critics felt the need to take the time to refute Corelli's claims in the first place. The *Quarterly Review* essay continues to use up precious word count to assure readers that 'Corelli's science wouldn't hold up to much investigation' (p. 308). This is a strange critique to apply to a publication one believes to be a fictional work of imagination; paradoxically, it actually grants the text a degree of seriousness by assuming that it requires refutation. Thus, even rejections of Corelli's creed and her claim to experience indicate the success of her paratextual attempts at verisimilitude.

These examples of reception represent a common failing among the critical set, particularly during Corelli's own time, to spot the ingenuity and canny strategy behind Corelli's blurring of author, narrator, and character. More recent critics have continued this failing, as when Masters concludes that Corelli's success was a result of her transparent sincerity: 'There is no sophistication, no selection, no device, no trick wherewith to hoodwink her audience'.[69] However, I tend to agree with Anne Stiles's conclusion that while Corelli can be described as a sincere 'idiosyncratic religious visionary along the lines of William Blake', she was primarily a 'skilled cultural broker who deftly interpreted and repackaged trendy social, spiritual, and scientific references in a manner calculated to supply maximum popular satisfaction.'[70] The

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[66] Qtd. from Bigland, p. 78.
[67] Qtd. from Bullock, pp. 42–42.
[68] 'Religious Novels', p. 310.
[69] Masters, p. 303.
[70] Stiles, *Popular Fiction and Brain Science*, p. 166.

balance between authenticity and the instincts of a fictioneer is difficult to determine; indeed, it was likely in a state of constant flux. The important conclusion to draw is simply that Corelli's claim to experience seems to be intended to both re-enforce the scientificity of her romances *and* to express sincere belief in particular elements of the psychic creed, an occult Christian science based on esoteric knowledge and a claim to personal experience.

Contested empiricisms: occultism, psychical research, and the 'expert' scientist

Corelli's placement of herself as a source of verisimilitude for the fantastic concepts and events in her novels is representative of a defining feature in the process in which a text is authored or received as science fiction. To a degree this relationship between author and text is an epistemological matter. The beliefs and intellectual frameworks of the author can contribute to the degree of science fictionality of a text, particularly in cases like that of Corelli, where a metaphysically motivated earnestness leads authors to ensure that their claims, however seemingly supernatural, are consistent with the demands of enframing. Thus far this dissertation has largely focused on such intellectual and abstract conditions for the intersection of SF and occultism, illustrating the manner in which both traditions naturalised supernatural phenomena and modernised ancient wisdom, often by recreating scientific discourse or connecting to deductive, pre-paradigmatic knowledge. This is the sort of comparative work that tends to dominate in critical studies of science fiction authors and their texts, where questions usually surround the relationship between a text and *what* thinkers of various stripes and ideologies think and write and dream — their invented cosmologies, their discoveries, their theories and hypotheses, both radical and banal.

It is just as important, however, to discuss science fiction's engagement with *how* people acquire this knowledge in the first place; how they experiment, network, and position themselves as arbiters capable of separating fact from fiction, how they engage with objects from texts to bacilli to spiritual agents, and how these things negotiate such action with agency of their own. The how of science is implicated in my discussion of deductive and inductive method in Chapter Two, as the acts of imagination that underly both science fictional writing and the inherent creativity of esoteric belief formation are clearly related to the scientific process of hypothesis. Much of my focus in that chapter, however, is on the intellectual legitimacy which a hypothetical knowledge state can lend to ideas and concepts. For the remainder of this chapter, I would like to shift from epistemology to method (though ever the twain shall meet) to analyse the science fiction of Corelli and her contemporaries as illustrative of the manner in which SF and occultism exploited disagreements surrounding how scientific research should be done. I will sketch the shape of these disagreements by describing two contesting approaches to scientific method in

the period: 1) objective observations performed by the trained scientist in conventional laboratory and field work, and 2) the subjective, experiential acquisition of knowledge valued in occultism and psychical research. I will then assess the manner in which occult (rather than conventional) scientific method intersected with SF in two areas that were crucial for its development. In the first, SF and occultism took advantage of the contested status of subjective observation and testimony in empirical method; in the second, they transposed the socially derived authority of the trained scientist to the author or narrator of fiction. These strategies represent a set of common methods used to construct the SF mode in the period, strategies which the genre graduated almost wholesale into later eras, without questioning their methodological origins.

Corelli's *Two Worlds* prologue acknowledged that proof of things like miracles and communication with angels was difficult in the modern positivist climate, but the novel's aim was to counter this by letting 'facts speak for themselves' (p. 18) — 'facts' established by personal experiences attributed to the author. This constitutes an argument for the empirical legitimacy of personal experience, an epistemological foundation that was losing its authority by the late nineteenth century, but which was still contested by psychical researchers and occultists. At stake was a form of evidence still much valued by these groups; namely, human testimony regarding experiences and observed events, particularly testimony as to phenomena encountered in areas like the mind, which were difficult to access with the tools of conventional empiricism. Regardless of one's view of the ontological validity of the discoveries made via occult or psychic experience, testimonies regarding these experiences were inherently narrative, complete with plot elements, self-characterisation, and setting. Such testimonial evidence could thus be enormously productive for the similarly narrative mode of science fiction.

While some scientists of the nineteenth century remained willing to accept such testimony as evidence, George Beard, a researcher and theoriser of 'cerebro-physiology',[71] spoke for a growingly influential group of naturalists and materialists when he rejected the evidence the average person gathered in the altered states of mind on which occultists so frequently relied when acquiring knowledge. Beard readily acknowledged the empirical evidence for both the trance state and its associated shifts in mental and physical function (p. 19), but argued that trance experiences and observations were the result of delusion and hallucination, thus, 'when in that stage their own statements of why they experience is (sic) of little or no value'.[72] Beard's

[71] Beard, 'New Theory of Trance', pp. 55–56. Beard first proposed his theory of trance to the New York Medico-Legal Society on 1 November 1876.

[72] Ibid. p. 33. On Beard's construction of himself as an 'expert' physiologist via comparison of his own method with that of Spiritualists, see Brown, 'Neurology and Spiritualism', pp. 563–77.

observations on the fallibility of the experiencing mind followed in the wake of influential research by mental physiologists who had shown that the mind, particularly in a hypnotised or trance state, is susceptible to experiencing what it has been told to experience. In James Braid's terms, at the suggestion of mesmerisers and mediums a subject could 'be made to perceive, and mistake for realities, whatever mental illusions or ideas are suggested to them.'[73] Braid argued that this capacity for illusion explained 'the whole of the well-ascertained apparent marvels of Magic, Witchcraft, Animal Magnetism, Hypnotism, Electro-Biology, Crystal-seeing, &c […] without violating any of the recognised laws of physiology and psychology.'[74] These ideas were influentially taken up by William Benjamin Carpenter, who emphasised the role that the mind's expectation of particular effects could take in producing the experience, or perception of experience, of those effects.[75] As a result of this fallibility, the first step in the development of any proper science, Beard argued, was 'the rejection of average human testimony. If we accept what people say, there can be no scientific knowledge of any kind' (p. 42).

It wasn't really the evidence of people that Beard had a problem with, however, it was that of everyone but people like himself. The average experiencer of paranormal or psychic events could not be trusted but the trained scientist could. Though they themselves had done much to prove the unreliability of the senses and the impact of culturally entrenched expectation on personal experience, physiologists like Carpenter and Beard still held faith in the ability of the scientist to give 'expert testimony' and to encounter experience with a 'trained intellect' that could resist 'the infinite errors that enter the brain through the doors of the senses'.[76] This was a claim with two dimensions, in both of which experience and testimony remained zones of contestation.[77] In the first, the scientist was profiled as a qualified experiencer of events that seemed paranormal. Like occultists and psychical researchers, they gathered knowledge via the experiential dimensions of empirical method; the difference was that the scientist could experience *properly*.

The trained expert encountered phenomena and filtered valid experiences from impossible illusions with a faculty Carpenter called 'common sense'. Similar to the contemporary use of the term, this was a trained habit, largely unconscious, by which the scientist could develop what Winter calls a 'mental reflex apparatus', an 'automatic sense of what was right and sensible'.[78]

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[73] Braid, *Magic, Witchcraft*, p. 66. Cf. Braid, 'Hypnotic Therapeutics, pp. 11–12.

[74] Braid, *Magic, Witchcraft*, p. 118.

[75] Carpenter, *Mesmerism, Spiritualism*, p. 112. Similar ideas were proposed by John Addington Symonds, Henry Maudsley, and Daniel Hack Tuke. See Neill, p. 25.

[76] Beard, 'New Theory of Trance', p. 5.

[77] On the essential grounding of empiricism in experience, and the instability of this relationship in the nineteenth century, see Garratt, pp. 16–37.

[78] Winter, *Mesmerized*, p. 302.

Carpenter argued that without an '*early culture* of scientific habits of thought', perfectly intelligent people would fall prey to 'a disposition to believe in "occult" agencies; and […] interpret everything in accordance with that belief.'[79] Huxley made a similar argument, denouncing Spiritualism, witchcraft, astrology, and possession as 'the same fundamental delusion' to which the majority of people were liable to fall prey because they 'are taught nothing which will help us to observe accurately and to interpret observations with due caution.'[80] For Carpenter, the only reliable experiencer was a man whose mind had been trained to reflexively perceive and describe his experiences in a matter consistent with known natural laws. Huxley was not so naive as to believe that the unconscious mind could so easily be rid of its illusory capacities, but he did trust to the conscious, educated observer to get it right. Recalling an experience in which a medium successfully interpreted his reflex actions so that she appeared to read his mind, Huxley noted that all that was required for a negative result the second time around was to keep 'my nerves and muscles under strict control'.[81]

The expert was thus reliable not just as a scientific thinker but as an *instrument*. Beard, Carpenter, and Huxley were part of shaping the longstanding scientific claim to objectivity, the perceived ability of the scientist to achieve an 'epistemological ideal of self-sacrifice, or even self-annihilation', to remove themselves from emotion, belief, identity, and cultural influences.[82] This claim has been significantly undermined by more contemporary sociologists and philosophers of science,[83] but in the period it was a significant aspect of the growing naturalistic and empiricist case against human accounts of paranormal experience.

The second claim of scientists like Carpenter and Huxley was that the trained scientist could, reinforced by common sense, judge the reliability of testimony. Common sense was not only a habit of mind, it was a body of knowledge compiled from the testimony of generations of scientists — 'the intelligent embodiment of the general experience of mankind'. Any claim to experience that seemed 'extraordinary' in comparison to this common sense and did not have similarly extraordinary evidence to back it up, could be summarily rejected.[84] As historians and philosophers of science have since pointed out, because very little knowledge can actually be acquired or verified through direct experience, such a body of testimony regarding previous observation must be gathered, and inherently trusted, in order for further hypothesis,

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[79] Carpenter, *Mesmerism, Spiritualism*, pp. 59–60.
[80] Huxley, 'Spiritualism Unmasked'.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Dawson and Lightman, Introduction to *Victorian Science and Literature*, p. xiv. Cf. Ophir and Shapin.
[83] See, e.g., Ophir and Shapin, esp. p. 4.
[84] Carpenter, *Mesmerism, Spiritualism*, pp. 57, 63. Cf. Carpenter, *Mental Physiology*, pp. 471–86; Beard, 'New Theory of Trance', pp. 55–56.

experimentation, and discovery to take place.[85] In this sense the compilation of scientific knowledge reveals itself as a network of testimonies gathered from experience and observation. Scientists like Beard and Carpenter could not possible evaluate the plausibility of each instance of occult, experience-based knowledge using specific observations of their own and were thus forced to rely upon what Steven Shapin calls 'schemes of plausibility', structures of previous observations and conclusions 'built up by crediting the relations of trusted sources'.[86] The figure of the trained scientist, their ability to evaluate the experiences of both themselves and others, and their ability to deliver trustworthy testimony of these experiences, thus emerge as core elements of the scientific process.

Psychical researchers and occultists understood the methodological power of the right claimed by scientific authorities to differentiate between reality and illusion — legitimate experience and supernatural fantasy — and they responded in kind. Psychical researchers, in particular, shared the commitment of their scientific compatriots to empirical method. What was actually at debate was not the necessity of acquiring sensible data, but the extent to which it was possible to do so, the methods used to acquire and report it, and the identity of those deploying these methods. At the core of all three of these debates was the hotly contested use of human testimony as evidence. While for some the scientist trained in common sense emerged as the frontline in the attempt to parse useful discoveries from the flotsam of the suggestible and hallucinatory mind, the dichotomy between fallible amateur and trained professional mind was by no means uncontested, particularly in scientific approaches to the mind, where, as Laura Otis observes, researchers often had no choice but to rely on the personal testimony of test subjects.[87]

Some of the best-known examples of this occurred in the psychical research flagshipped by the SPR. The organisation's member researchers mirrored contemporaries like Carpenter and Huxley in profiling their research endeavours as something methodologically separate from occultism,[88] but their openness to the reality of naturalistic psychical phenomena inevitably required reliance on human testimony. The 'Proceedings' of the SPR's Literary Committee were primarily collected experiencer or observer reports, either collated from texts published in the last two centuries, or solicited from the public via advertisements in 'leading London and provincial journals'.[89] This method was bracketed by deductive analysis and 'direct experience', a tripartite method which also formed the basis of Gurney, Myers, and Podmore's *Phantasms of*

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[85] See, e.g., Shapin, *Social History of Truth*, pp. 24–25; Popper, pp. 28–31.
[86] Shapin, *Social History of Truth*, pp. 21–22.
[87] Otis, p. 326.
[88] See Luckhurst, *Invention of Telepathy*, pp. 57–58.
[89] 'Report of the Literary Committee', p. 116.

the Living.[90] As we have seen, the central deduction they drew from this evidence also emphasised the vagaries of human mental experience, as the authors of *Phantasms* traced the vast majority of occult experiences to 'hallucinations of the senses', promulgated by telepathic effects (p. xxii). The recourse to telepathy, however, a deductive leap already made by theorists and researchers from Collyer to Knowles to Bulwer-Lytton, remained a challenge to conventional empiricism in that telepathy itself was difficult to establish. Myers, Gurney, and Podmore's reliance on testimony, particularly in the form of solicited correspondence from the public, was subject to much criticism,[91] but they insisted that the narratives of experience they had collated were 'on the whole, trustworthy'.[92]

The methods of the SPR mirrored earlier attempts to verify claims to paranormal experience, particularly within mesmerism. Here, even before the professionalisation of science had gathered full steam, the trustworthiness of the experiencing mind of the scientist was already a point of contention on which various theories relied. Winter has shown that John Elliotson reversed the formula of Beard and Carpenter. He shared their lack of respect for what Beard called the mind of 'the average shop-girl',[93] but valued such minds as tools of empirical observation because, he believed, their very lack of education and experience made them less suggestible to a particular outcome and less likely to be capable of falsehood. Conversely, he was suspicious of middle class subjects or medical peers who he felt tainted the research with an 'undesirable obtrusion of their own sense of identity'.[94] Scottish chemist William Gregory, defending the decision of German scientist Carl von Reichenbach to rely on the testimony of 'sensitives' in gathering the evidence from which he derived his quasi-mesmerist theory of the 'Od' or 'Odyle',[95] based his arguments on a more inclusive valuation of the experiencing mind. Gregory argued that those who dismissed von Reichenbach's theory because he had relied on accounts of experience were completely unjustified in simply rejecting the testimony of dozens of witnesses, the majority of them 'intelligent and educated persons'.[96]

Occultist methods of acquiring knowledge through the technologies of mediumship embedded themselves in this context, acquiring at least a veneer of empiricist legitimacy both through their consanguinity with methods like those of Reichenbach and the SPR, and through their own efforts. The claims of occult experiencers varied from movement to movement and

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[90] See Gurney and others, p. xlix.

[91] G. Stanley Hall, for example, called it a 'gross and preposterous methodical error' (p. 677). Cf. Luckhurst, *Invention of Telepathy*, p. 74; Delgado, p. 246.

[92] Gurney and others, p. l.

[93] Beard, 'New Theory of Trance', p. 24.

[94] Winter, *Mesmerized*, p. 66. Cf. pp. 61–62, 79–81.

[95] Von Reichenbach, p. 271.

[96] Gregory, Editor's Preface to *Researches on Magnetism,* p. xxi.

person to person: a Spiritualist of a naturalistic bent might have a different view of the ramifications of supernormal experience than a late-century ritual magician. There were a number of commonalities, however, that make it possible to speak of an 'occult empiricism' — an esoteric acquisition and establishment of knowledge via psychical experience and testimony. Occult empiricism displayed a number of shared characteristics with psychical research, and, to a lesser degree, also resonated on certain levels with conventional empiricism. At all points of similarity *and* difference, however, occultism's emphasis on harnessing the unknown gnostic potential of the entranced, subconscious, or imagining mind lent a sense of the brash, the bold, the fantastic, to its claims to empirical, experientially derived knowledge.

Just as occultists sought to naturalise and modernise a whole range of magical, spiritual, and supernatural claims via the discourse and hypothetical spaces of science, so they sought, in appearance anyway, to adopt its methods. Occult experience provided a way to substantiate knowledge deemed metaphysical or supernatural in a manner philosophically amenable to the sensible requirements of empiricism. Thus, a host of séance-goers claimed to have seen, to have felt, or to have heard the spirits of the dead, while historians of Spiritualism like Britten collated accounts of these encounters.[97] In such situations, humans gifted with particular faculties of experience — the hyper-evolved human technologies of mediumship — acted as research tools. In séances the medium was as much an instrument of knowledge of the unknown universe as is the Large Hadron Collider. In other forms of occult empirical enquiry, guided, as we have seen in the case of Britten's Chevalier, by the clairvoyant mind or the astral self, the physical manifestations of the séance were entirely absent, leaving the indefinable spaces of mind or consciousness as a proving ground akin, in the occultist view, to the laboratory, an observing organ that could receive and translate phenomena that could not be sensed by the technologies of conventional empiricism.

Science fiction and occult empiricism

As the question of the limits and possibilities of empirical method was very much a scientific one, it is no surprise that early science fiction would be a common place to discover plots, intrigues, and themes derived from the conflict over the boundaries of empiricism. Indeed, science fiction's very emergence can traced in part to the 'literary technology' inaugurated by Enlightenment-era natural philosophers including Robert Boyle and Isaac Newton as they sought to communicate the method and results of experiment.[98] Literary historians have attributed the very rise of the

[97] See Britten's *Modern American Spiritualism* and *Nineteenth Century Miracles*.
[98] Shapin, 'Pump and Circumstance'. Cf. Cantor.

novel itself, and therefore of prose fiction as we know it, to empiricism's resolve to 'collect, organize, and make sense of the data of sensory experience'.[99] Roger Maioli has described the techniques which early novelists like Aphra Behn and Daniel Defoe developed in response to new empiricist requirements for natural evidence in the shaping of knowledge, making a 'false claim to historicity' through the affectation of direct observation and the testimony of trustworthy characters and narrators.[100] Studies of nineteenth-century literature and science have frequently observed a similar influence of empirical method and the empiricist worldview in the rise of literary realism or the naturalism of Emile Zola.[101]

Science fiction, however, following in the lineage of Behn and Defoe, can also be seen as a product of the conflation of literature with empiricist method and ideology. It too reproduces the viewpoint of the objective, empirical observer, and it even surpasses realism in this regard in that its characters and narrators tend to ground and secularise imaginal and supernatural worlds by appealing to the methods and structures of empirical science.[102] Yet, SF positions itself between realism and the fantastic by recreating an occult empiricist claim to knowledge. It separates itself from other genres of the fantastic by following realism's mimetic recreation of the viewpoint of the objective observer, but it trains this empiricist lens on the ineffable, the non-sensory, and the supernatural. The empirical observers of science fiction are sometimes careful microbiologists and studious astronomers, but just as often they are psychonauts, viewing a million suns from the star ship of the mind. The data gathered by science fiction's observers is a record of dreams, visions, and wonders.

I want to argue that science fiction's complex relationship with scientific method — in which it often affects the methods and perspectives of empiricism only to move beyond them — is rooted in the dynamics of experience and testimony through which occultism and psychical research challenged the assumptions of conventional empiricism. The contesting empiricisms of the nineteenth century are thus another key site of engagement for occultism and SF, providing an additional forum in which the qualified scientism of both enabled their mutual development, informing and reinforcing each other with the symbols, radical methods, and infinite visions of the scientific imaginary. Early science fiction often reflects the battle over the limits of empirical method. However, SF such as that produced by Bulwer, Britten, and Corelli was more clearly and centrally motivated by occult empiricism than most texts. As such, I will focus on fiction that specifically channelled the methods of occult science in order to show that challenges to

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[99] Maioli, p. viii. Cf. Watt, pp. 31–32.

[100] Maioli, p. 13.

[101] See, e.g., Levine, *Realistic Imagination*; Dawson and Lightman, Introduction to *Victorian Science and Literature*, p. xiv.

[102] On the congruities between SF and literary realism, see Brooke-Rose, pp. 85–102.

established empirical method could contribute to, rather than forestall, the production of an SF mode. In addition to my three case study authors I will consider another important example of occultist science fiction, *Karma: A Novel* (1886), Theosophist Alfred Percy Sinnett's fictionalised defence of occult empiricism.

Occult-infused SF is also a productive subject for analysis because its authors were most likely to messily emulate conventional empiricism in order to dialogue with its tenets and assumptions. It is not coincidental that authors like Britten and Corelli would choose fiction to issue this challenge. The growing social and epistemological clout of the trained scientist enabled straight-forward routes to publication of their ideas surrounding the value of non-expert experience and testimony, and thus a platform for the rejection of both occult concepts and methodologies. While occultists had a plethora of periodicals, lecture halls, and sitting rooms available in which they could put forward their views of the universe and how it was to be known, ultimately these forums, similar to the echo chamber of contemporary social media, tended to cater to the already converted. The volume on the occultist megaphone could not be turned to that achievable by a Huxley or a Carpenter. I am not arguing that occult empiricism would have won the day were it not for those pesky naturalists, but certainly it was harder for even leading Spiritualist mediums or Theosophists to reach the public ear with their rival scientific methodologies. One forum, however, in which it was quite easy to be heard, a medium that attracted enormous public attention and which enabled, in that period anyway, pages and pages of ink to be spilled over philosophical and scientific issues, was fiction. Through fiction, authors like Corelli were able to pose a variety of methodological challenges to the conventions of empirical science, thus generating science fiction out of a dialogue with a central current of enframing.

Let us turn back to Corelli to consider the first few challenges of occult empiricism. One of the core tenets of British empiricism — and scientific naturalism as well — was the uniformity of natural law over the whole of the known universe, which, mental physiologist Henry Maudsley argued, was established by corresponding 'uniformities of experience'. Individual experiences that contravened 'the slowly gained and consolidated experience of the race embodied in […] law'[103] — in 'common sense' in other words — could thus be immediately invalidated as an 'inference from the particular to the general when the general has not the authority of adequate experience to warrant it' (p. 19). This was the basis of Beard's argument against occult experience, which he noted seemed available only to a small minority of the population.[104] Some esoteric theorists combatted arguments based in universality by insisting that the psychic abilities required for occult empiricism were in fact available to all. Thus, P.B. Randolph assured his

[103] Maudsley, *Natural Causes and Supernatural Seemings*, p. 13.
[104] Beard, 'New Theory of Trance', pp. 28–31.

readers, clairvoyance was 'a power that can be had for the trying, as any good mesmerist will affirm and prove'.[105]

Others, however, took a contrasting position against this underlying principle of 'common sense', arguing that not all human experiences were equivalent, that the technologies of mediumship were unique abilities possessed by those with spiritual gifts or anatomical peculiarities that put them at the forefront of human evolution. This is expressed in Bulwer's *Haunted*, where the psychical researcher narrator argues that evidence of purportedly supernatural phenomena is out of the reach of science without a 'living being, with constitutional peculiarities capable of obtaining these signs' (p. 37). Corelli's novels are populated with characters uniquely able to access such evidence and reduce it the data of testimony. The Electric Woman's establishment of the psychic creed through her astral journeys and Rosicrucian initiation is the best-known example, but El-Râmi's exploration of the universe via the soul of Lilith best exemplifies the research potential of extraordinary psychic powers. The reports compiled from Lilith's astral voyages establish the epistemological potential of occult empiricism for both psychical research and astronomy. If we take Lilith's coma-like state of virtual enslavement out of the picture, her astral experiences are virtually equivalent to real-life occult empirical exploration of the solar system by two Golden Dawn adepts, Annie Horniman and Frederick Leigh Gardner, who travelled astrally to the planets and the Sun, taking concise notes as to the events, beings, and civilisations encountered in these experiences upon their return.[106] The method of inquiry of El-Râmi as scientist, meanwhile, is virtually identical to that of Swiss psychologist Theodore Flournoy, who, in precisely the same period, recorded the somnambular planetary visitations of medium 'Hélène Smith' (Catherine-Élise Müller). In light of Smith's claims to visit Mars in a trance state, Flournoy theorised that Hélène's accounts were 'a species of romance of the subliminal imagination' rather than an actual experience, a narrative process enabled by the unique creative strength of her unconscious mind.[107]

This hypothesis has important ramifications for our perception of the relationship between science fiction and occult experience, as Smith's trance voyages are an early example of SF shaping psychic encounter. Smith's experience may also have specific importance for our consideration of Corelli, as it is likely that Hélène's psychic visits to Mars were the result of prior readings of science fictional depictions of both Martian society *and* astral, clairvoyant, or soul travel to this and other planets. Flournoy struggled to identify any previous account of a medium claiming to have explored 'the illimitable horizon which spiritism opens up to its happy

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[105] Randolph, *Dealings with the Dead*, pp. 8–9.
[106] See Owen, *Place of Enchantment*, pp. 1–2, 157–61.
[107] Flournoy, p. 13. Cf. pp. 87–89.

followers',[108] but, as discussed in more detail in the next chapter, Lilith and the Electric Woman, like Britten's Chevalier, are situated in a common space travel trope of the period. If we accept Flournoy's ultimate conclusion that Smith's trance states were freeing her creative juices for 'somnambulistic romances' far more than somnambular travel,[109] we might posit a place for Corelli's and Britten's novels as part of a wider body of intertextual influences on the fictionalising unconscious of Smith and other astral voyagers.

Through occult empiricism, the mage-scientists of Corelli's novels emerge as expert experiencers in the mould laid down by researchers like Beard and Huxley. Lilith and the Electric Woman connect to occultist attempts to reassert the reliability of the unconscious mind. We have seen that naturalist physiologists attributed occult experience to the delusory capacities of this easily affected part of the brain, but for occultists, and, to a lesser degree for psychical researchers, the power of the unconscious mind was not a problem but a solution, particularly when its sensing and observing capabilities could be liberated in the trance state. The powers and states typically attributed to the unconscious mind could enable new scientific discoveries in areas difficult to access via conventional empirical techniques, as well as enable a greater understanding of the functions of the mind itself. Some occultists mirrored Elliotson and von Reichenbach in identifying the unconscious as the only part of the self capable of unaffected, objective observation. Thus, for example, A.J. Davis reflected Beard's concept of the 'trained expert' in arguing that mediums needed to undergo training and development until their 'individualism of character' was 'annihilated […] and the impressions truly are just what the *controlling* power desires'.[110] This is the model that Flournoy pursued with Smith, and it was at the root of many Spiritualist understandings of the occult empiricism of mediumship.[111] In this perspective, the occult experiencer is viewed as a human laboratory instrument in the hands of a psychical researcher or occult empiricist. Some of Corelli's occult scientist heroes draw on this conception of the human mind as scientific technology. Lilith and the Electric Woman are passive observing tools of El-Râmi and Heliobas. The Electric Woman, much like Davis's ideal medium, must be prepared for her experience of astral exploration through meditation and applications of human electricity.

However, Corelli's experiencing occult scientists are just as often active pursuers of experiential knowledge, much like the scientist harrying the natural world in search of its secrets.

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[108] Ibid. p. 88.
[109] Ibid. p. 266.
[110] Davis, *Present Age*, pp. 56–62, 187–92. Cf. Taves, pp. 178, 197–98, 200.
[111] See Owen, *Darkened Room*, p. 10.

The Electric Woman might be a passive, experiencing mind, but Heliobas has developed an active occult research technique which he assures her that she will eventually also develop:

> When you have educated your Will to a certain height of electric command, you can at your pleasure see at any time, and see plainly, the spirits who inhabit the air; and also those who, descending to long distances below the Great Circle, come within the range of human electricity, or the attractive matter contained in the Earth's atmosphere. (pp. 197–98)

Heliobas himself has used this technique to discover not only the 'Central Sphere' and its electric emanations, but also that the Earth's sun is a dying world in the process of being reabsorbed into the Electric Circle. The moon's situation is even more dire. Through his ability for will-powered astral observation, Heliobas has discovered that it no longer exists: 'What we see is the reflection or the *electrograph* of what she was. Atmospherical electricity has imprinted this picture of a long-ago living world upon the heavens' (p. 201). Conventional empirical methods have not been able to make this discovery, as, Heliobas assures the Electric Woman, they only enhance the illusion.

A similar active occult empiricism underlies Morgana's scientific method. She is the world's most accomplished scientist, but this pre-eminence is the result of the fact that she is also an evolved member of a 'new race' who can work '*with* the universal force, not as the world does, *against* it'.[112] It is Morgana's ability to perceive the spiritual aspects of the secret force she and Roger discover that allows her to effortlessly harness it; when Roger makes the same attempt — but for destructive purposes and from a materialist perspective — he goes mad (p. 300). In all of these conceptions, Corelli is able to incorporate magical causality and supernatural realms into her fiction while yet retaining science fictional verisimilitude — not just by appealing to scientific discourse or marginal hypotheses, but by adopting the contested empirical method of acquiring knowledge from individual psychical experience.

No novel of the period grapples with occult empiricism more than Sinnett's *Karma*, written as a fictional companion to *The Occult World* (1881) and *Esoteric Buddhism*, books that contributed enormously to popularising Theosophy and systematising the knowledge which Sinnett claimed to have received from occult masters via the social and psychical mediumship of Blavatsky. *Karma* engages as much with the claims of Theosophy surrounding reincarnation, the astral realm, and clairvoyance, as it does with the *methods* by which Sinnett received information regarding the nature of these phenomena. The novel recreates Sinnett's reception of occult wisdom from Mahatmas like Koot Hoomi in the form of letters delivered astrally or via snail mail.

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[112] *SP*, p. 318. Cf. pp. 98, 100–01.

It also extensively represents, and attempts to scientifically legitimate, the claims of Blavatsky and other early Theosophists to have contacted the masters telepathically or in astral form.[113]

As Sinnett describes in his 1912 *Autobiography*, he wrote *Karma* on a tour of Switzerland during which he carried out experiments with a young psychic named Ethel Durand. The experiments, designed to substantiate her powers, took place 'with invariable success' during walks in the woods or in rooms at their hotel.[114] Sinnett conflated this combination of geography, experience, and experiment with the similar background of his encounters with Blavatsky and the Mahatmas. The hotel is upgraded to a castle on the Rhine; Durand and Blavatsky are represented by a psychic named Mrs. Lakesby, and Koot Hoomi takes the form of an Austrian adept named Baron Friedrich von Mondstern, who is on the verge of spiritually and psychically evolving out of the range of human experience. The Baron belongs to an occult brotherhood which, like the Mahatmas, has been guarding the perennial knowledge of the esoteric doctrine for millennia. Now, however, he has been tasked with sharing some of the order's knowledge and power for the betterment of humankind, just as the Mahatmas communicated with humanity through Sinnett.

The Baron has therefore gathered to the castle a group of English socialites and intellectuals who have 'shown some intelligent leaning towards inquiry into psychic matters' (p. 2). The first half of the novel describes the Baron's displays of astral travel, telepathy, and telekinesis, all witnessed and evaluated by other characters, led by Willy Blane, an amateur psychical researcher, and Professor Arthur Massilton, a well-respected scientist in whom the Baron — and, by extension, Sinnett himself — has invested much of the respectability of his project. In the second half the Baron makes way for Mrs. Lakesby, who displays her clairvoyant powers by describing experiences on the astral plane, including encounters with adepts like the Baron, and by psychically viewing the past incarnations of others in the group. Her successful displays of psychic ability substantiate occult experience, but also provide evidence for the doctrines of reincarnation and karma which Sinnett felt himself charged to share with the world.

Sinnett's novel thus authentically deploys the reciprocity of life and fiction which Corelli claimed for her fiction. *Karma* does not seem to have been widely read, but it was a part of the Theosophical Society's circulating library and would have been received by readers so inclined with the same authority as occultists received the 'autobiography' of Britten's Chevalier.[115] More importantly for my present purposes, the novel is centrally concerned with the problem of empirically legitimating both individual occult experience and the value of witness testimony

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[113] On the Mahatmas and their correspondence, see Hammer, pp. 380–86; Godwin, 'Blavatsky and the First Generation of Theosophy', pp. 19–20.

[114] Sinnett, *Autobiography*, p. 29.

[115] See *The Path*, July 1889, p. 128, <http://www.iapsop.com/archive/materials/the_path/the_path_v4_n4_july_1889.pdf> [Accessed 12 November 2018].

regarding the reality of psychic powers. At the time that Sinnett wrote *Karma*, the SPR had only recently published its damning 'Hodgson Report' (1885), which claimed to expose the Mahatma letters as Blavatsky forgeries, and critiqued Sinnett's account in *The Occult World* of letters appearing out of the astral realm — falling suddenly from the ceiling or manifesting inside cushions.[116] *Karma* thus represents a riposte, via fiction, to attacks on the claims to occult experience by both Sinnett and his mentor Blavatsky. In the same period that novels by Thomas Antsey Guthrie and Richard Marsh made light of the perceived fraud behind the Mahatma letters,[117] Sinnett turned to fiction to defend them.

The core of *Karma*'s defence of *The Occult World* and the experiences and knowledge it details is an argument for occult empiricism, a method, the novel insists, that must augment the physical sciences if human knowledge is to advance. The Baron instructs his gathering of amateur psychical researchers that the purpose of establishing the reality of psychical abilities is not simply to prove their existence, but to encourage their use in future scientific discovery. This prompts Annerly, a member of the group with a biography similar to Sinnett himself, to theorise that 'a new departure' in empirical method is required (p. 69). Phenomena like telepathy have 'proved by a thousand experiments' that the mind is capable of expanded sensory perception, and thus 'the barriers of what has hitherto been the "Unknowable" are broken down' (p. 69). Echoing Sinnett's claim that *The Occult World* provided 'experimental proofs […] that occult science invests its adepts with a control of natural forces superior to that enjoyed by physicists of the ordinary type' (p. 2), *Karma* advocates a futuristic occult empiricism of the sort that I have identified as a central meeting point for occultism and science fiction. The Baron is confident that this psychic science will successfully challenge conventional empiricism: 'I think you will find,' he says, 'that when public attention is turned to the subject more generally, people will accept the existence of such faculties as a natural fact, and study them in all their manifestations' (p. 52).

The novel as a whole, however, is less naive. It reflects Sinnett's awareness of the contested value of testimony. Already in 1881, he worried about the value of his account of the Mahatmas and their powers: 'This little book contains a straight-forward statement of absolute truths, which if people could only believe them would revolutionize the world […]. But the bulk of mankind will be blinded to this condition of things by their own vanity and inability to assimilate super-materialistic ideas'.[118] Led by Blane and Massilton, the group gathered at the castle seeks to

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[116] See Hodgson and others. In the same year that Sinnett published *Karma*, he and Blavatsky produced a non-fictional riposte to the report. See Sinnett and Blavatsky. On debates surrounding authorship of the Mahatma letters, see Oppenheim, pp. 174–78; Godwin, *Theosophical Enlightenment*, pp. 346–47.

[117] F. Antsey, *A Fallen Idol*, 1886; Marsh, *The Mahatma's Pupil*, 1893.

[118] Sinnett, *Occult World*, p. 161.

design a methodology that will forestall this problem, attempting 'to forecast all the objections that might ultimately be raised by critics who might distrust their narration of what might occur' (p. 126). *Karma* is thus different from most SF in that it does not assume its own empirical legitimacy. Rather, an SF mode is created through internal scientific debate. The novel positions itself between opposing viewpoints on the value of occult empiricism; though it is ultimately an advocate for the evidential value of testimony, the voices of Blane and Massilton enable it to express a scepticism as to its own content that creates a sense of verisimilitude for the reader.

With the guidance of Blane and Massilton, the novel explores several key aspects of the nineteenth-century debate over testimony. First, in going to great lengths to substantiate the trustworthiness and authority of its occult empiricists, particularly the Baron, Lakesby, and Massilton, it attempts to widen the spectrum of voices on whose testimonial evidence the 'common sense' body of knowledge is established. The novel also joins with a contemporaneous debate over the social spaces in which scientific observation could reliably take place. Scientists like Tyndall argued that careful testing performed in the laboratory trumped observations made in fieldwork or in 'country-house science'.[119] This latter venue was a common space of occult experience — the forum of the séance and the psychical display. By setting the observations and experiments of the Baron's group in the parlours of an aristocrat's home, Sinnett draws on this locational context, championing a democratised view of science in which not just professional scientists with keys to the laboratory, but any member of the public with psychic faculties or a willingness to observe their results can participate in the formation of knowledge. Lastly, *Karma* heavily emphasises group corroboration. Occult empiricists frequently took advantage of the evidential strength of multiple witnesses to paranormal or psychic events. Novelist and Spiritualist Catherine Crowe, for example, argued that while individual assertions as to the nature of the spirit life were 'comparatively valueless', 'the amount of recurrent cases forms a body of evidence, that on any other subject would scarcely be rejected'.[120] The Professor expresses doubt that his account of the Baron's powers will be enough to convince the wider world of their validity, but the Baron assures him that the whole point of the gathering at the castle is 'to fortify your own evidence by that of several others' (p. 110). The Professor embraces this as a core element of his evidential case for occult experience, insisting on the validity of any occult ability witnessed by four or five others (pp. 44–46), though he never quite feels that he has designed a bullet-proof scientific method (p. 132).

Early science fiction did not usually generate verisimilitude out of so direct a dialogue with empirical method, but occult empiricism's subjective research methods and testimonial evidence

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[119] See Rankin and Barton, pp. 60–62.
[120] Crowe, *Night Side of Nature*, p. 20.

proved fertile for a wide range of authors and texts in this early period, laying down the mode of subjective, testimony-based affectation of scientific reportage with which SF would proceed forward into the twentieth century. Convinced by his own experiences at the hands of Margrave, for example, Bulwer's Fenwick finds himself no longer able to reject the historical mass of testimony to witchcraft and sorcery, now 'ascribed to animal magnetism and electro-biology' (*SS*, II, 211). This change of mind is provoked by Faber's argument that though he himself has not witnessed the vast majority of the events claimed by these traditions, 'they are recorded 'upon evidence too respectable, nevertheless, to permit me peremptorily to deny what I have not witnessed' (ibid.). This reflects Bulwer's opinion in an essay on scientific method, where he calls any scientist a 'bigot' who refuses to investigate a phenomenon, however incongruous with the 'known laws of nature', that is supported by 'fact deposed by numerous witnesses'.[121]

It is unsurprising to find occult empiricism supporting science fictional elements in the works of authors with interest in occult science, but the same clash of testimony and empiricism enabled science fiction more broadly. Novels like Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895) and *The Island of Dr Moreau* (1896) rely on the trustworthy perspective of the trained expert to convince the reader of concepts and events that completely decamp from the territory of the known or the possible. Wells even uses the inflated testimonial status of the expert to enfold the scientised occult into several early stories, including 'The Story of the Late Mr. Elvesham' (1896), where the sole narratorial perspective is an expert possessed of Beard's 'trained intellect'. Midway through the story the narrator's consciousness is forcibly swapped into the dying body of Mr. Elvesham, a leading mental physiologist who has, by thus swapping bodies, discovered a murderous form of immortality. The new Mr. Elvesham, our expert narrator, is treated 'as one demented' when he attempts to explain this transfer of consciousness, but begs the reader to trust the veracity of his account on terms that meld empiricism and narrative in the rhetorical expectations of scientific reportage: 'I appeal to the reader, whether there is any trace of insanity in the style or method of the story he has been reading' (p. 137).

The adoption of an occult empiricist mode of scientific discovery, legitimation, and reportage has been responsible for many of SF's most well-known tropes. The clearest example, perhaps, is the perpetual legitimacy of psychic powers like ESP, telepathy, and telekinesis, which have been upheld by the vestigial empiricist currency of subjective testimony. Another notable example is the movement of the alien and the spaceship off the pages of science fiction into human experience. As Jeffrey J. Kripal has shown, focusing on the influential examples of paranormal researcher Charles Fort and SF editor Ray Palmer, these accounts of experience were often

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[121] Bulwer-Lytton, 'New Theories', pp. 137, 140.

formulated within a reciprocal process of engagement with science fiction texts.[122] Extra-terrestrial beings and civilisations imagined in SF helped to shape the imagery through which thousands of claims to real-life experience were expressed in the twentieth century. The testimonials of these experiences have, in turn, continued to inform and reinforce what is now a well-defined mythos of alien encounter absolutely inseparable from the culturally constructed identity of the SF mode. Thus, though a panoply of leading physicists and astronomers have theorised on the probabilities and suspected nature of life on other planets, all the 'evidence' which has contributed to beliefs regarding extra-terrestrials, as well as the vast set of science fictional imaginaries that inform these beliefs, has been derived from a continued engagement between SF and occult empiricism. Ufological data is gathered in the form of subjective testimony, some of it corroborated by large numbers of witnesses, most of it largely ignored by professional scientists, and all of it indelibly marked by the extra-terrestrial beings, civilisations, and technologies of science fiction.

SF's verisimilar mode of revelation thus echoes that of occult empiricism in a number of crucial aspects, all of which can be seen as evolving in tandem, often reliant on each other, in the nineteenth century. Both occultism and SF mimicked empirical method to legitimate phenomena most naturalistic scientists would have consigned to the fantastic; as a part of this attempt to make ideas and concepts sympatico with empiricist frameworks, both appealed to the rhetorics and social constructions that helped empiricism to maintain its epistemic dominance. At the core of this appeal was the experience of subjective human perception. The knowledge through which science fiction presents itself as fact, is, like the knowledge of occultism and, indeed, like much scientific knowledge, based on testimony.

Verisimilitude and authority: the life of the science fiction author

Early SF authors like Wells and Sinnett are careful to place impossible testimonies in the mouths of occult empiricist narrators who approximate to the expert scientist of Beard, Carpenter, and Huxley. Such appeals to authority are a second area in which SF and occultism met in adopting the methods of occult empiricism. The sources of authority in which SF and occultism sought legitimation were quite varied, ranging from social and intellectual status to the prophetic quality of the claim to personal gnosis via the technologies of mediumship. I would like to assess these efforts at legitimation in the context of a similar range of scientific claims to authority in the period, arguing that SF developed a unique, occult empiricist strategy for infusing texts with

[122] Kripal, *Mutants and Mystics*, pp. 77–120; Kripal, *Authors of the Impossible*, pp. 122–23.

verisimilitude, in which the knowledge claims of characters, narrators, and even authors could be substantiated not just by intellectual context but by the authoritative persona of characters or authors themselves.

Geoffrey Cantor has argued that the 'authoritative power of a scientific fact was no longer underwritten by the social standing of the experimenter and the witnesses' following the seventeenth century.[123] However, the conflict over the epistemological authority of occult empiricism indicates that the question of *who* observed and experienced in empirical research was still very much a source of debate in the nineteenth century, supporting the social constructionist view that all knowledge, even the purportedly objective data gathered by the neutral scientific observer, is social.[124] We have seen that George Beard's primary ground for rejecting 'non-expert human testimony of vast proportions' was not an inductive conclusion from gathered evidence.[125] Rather, he was convinced that the experiencing perspective of a single 'expert' intellectual should trump the countervailing perspective of even a large number of untrained observers.[126] Huxley made a similar argument in differentiating science from 'pseudo-science', which he defined not in terms of provably inaccurate knowledge, but as any theory proposed by 'those who have neither undergone the discipline, nor possess the information' required 'to deal with the most difficult problems of science'.[127]

Winter observes that the nineteenth-century movement of scientific research and knowledge formation from a broader, more democratic project to a more disciplined and rigorous, but also more exclusive, professionalised science, had the side effect of narrowing the scope of research. Phenomena that did not fit easily within the newly defined branches of science were often overlooked or 'entirely abandoned' by researchers.[128] Successful attempts by the new professional scientist corps to limit the establishment of naturalistic knowledge to the expert researcher were thus a key part of the rejection of particular forms of knowledge that led to an understanding of certain traditions, practices, and experiences as esoteric and occult. Winter has thoroughly demonstrated that earlier in the century a marginal science like mesmerism could enjoy attention from a wide social range of thinkers, from social reformers to religious figures to authors of fiction to leading scientists, thus broadening the accessibility of science to both elite and popular engagement.[129] Later approaches to similar phenomena, however, required the

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[123] Cantor, pp. 163–64.
[124] See, e.g., Shapin, *Social History of Truth*, esp. pp. 23–27.
[125] Beard, 'New Theory of Trance', p. 30.
[126] Ibid. p. 44.
[127] Huxley, 'Science and Pseudo-Science', p. 116.
[128] Winter, *Mesmerized*, p. 301.
[129] Ibid.; Winter, 'Mesmerism and Popular Culture', pp. 329–31.

involvement of recognised scientists and/or the support of scientific institutions to become the subject of serious empirical interest.

There was still some fluidity to all this by the late nineteenth century, however. The need for authoritative advocacy did not necessarily prevent more radical empirical methods from finding support. The SPR formed itself around leading thinkers based in several fields, including physics, mathematics, and anthropology, indicating a clear awareness of the need to speak from a position of social authority in order to lend gravitas to the methods and subjects of occult empiricism. Moreover, as Alex Warwick observes, 'authority' was more widely distributed in scientific research of the nineteenth century than in later periods. In a time where scientists had neither the epistemological nor the social standing they would by the twentieth century, Prince Albert, hardly a trained expert, lent his prestige as president of the British Association for the Advancement of Science. Conversely, scientists like Huxley could gain greater scientific authority as *authors*, writing popular introductions or articles in mainstream periodicals.[130]

By now, it should not be surprising to hear that occultists found creative ways to justify occult empiricist methods and findings in the context of these contested understandings of authority. Many of the same authority figures who helped legitimate the activities of the SPR supported more specifically esoteric and marginalised scientific endeavours, as we have seen in the advocacy of Spiritualism by Wallace, Crookes, and Lodge. Aligned with these quite successful appeals to recognised scientific voices, occultists commonly claimed, like Sinnett, to have discovered not just new knowledge that would revolutionise modern science, but new sources of authority. Thus, for example, the 'science' of Blavatsky's *Secret Doctrine* was presented as received from mentally and spiritually evolved masters like Koot Hoomi. This sort of authority lends much of the backing to the occult empiricism of Britten's Chevalier or Sinnett's Baron; in both men, occult scientific mastery is also combined with the social authority of nobility. Occultists were also much more willing to look to the authority of the venerable sages of the past, building on the tendency to present modern knowledge and technology as presaged by (and soon to be succeeded by) the wisdom of the ancients. Thus, for example, when his own authority as an aristocratic intellectual was sought on Spiritualism by Lady Combermere, Bulwer rejected spirit communication but was quite ready to acknowledge unknown 'agencies of communication'. His evidence for this was the testimony of Cornelius Agrippa and Albertus Magnus, who 'boasted powers […] with a degree of earnest detail which the gravity of their characters and their general observation of science and nature do not permit candid inquirers to dismiss as invented lies.'[131]

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[130] Warwick, pp. 6–7.

[131] Edward Bulwer-Lytton to Lady Combermere, 3 October 1854, in *Life*, II, 45–47.

Occultism was not the only nineteenth-century tradition which responded creatively to the scientific claim to sole epistemological authority. Sherryl Vint has shown that SF has often been used to reflect and explore the social constructedness of science, arguing that its very narrativity requires 'the technologies it presents to be embedded in a full social world [which] helps us to remember that science does not exist in a vacuum but is produced by, and in turn shapes, a contingent, malleable, complex social world.'[132] Vint does not discuss the role of authority in this process of social construction, nor the methodological challenges posed by esoteric science. Yet, similar to the manner in which it adopted occult empiricist approaches to testimony, early science fiction frequently emulated the appeal to established epistemological or social authority found in occultism, thus relying, as Vint describes, on the contingencies and contested complexities of the social aspect of 'doing' science. In doing so, it helped to lay the groundwork for another rhetorical tool of science fiction: the creation of verisimilitude via the authority of the narrator or, more rarely, an authorial persona.

We have already seen this method at work in Wells's fiction, where he uses it to enfold occult materials into an empirically verisimilar narrative shell. Phenomena from clairvoyance ('The Curious Case of Davidson's Eyes' (1895); 'The Crystal Egg' (1897)) to astral travel and the spirit realm ('The Plattner Story') are made to appear consistent with rationalist and empiricist frameworks via the narratorial presence of young, well-educated, male scientific researchers. Edward Prendick, the scientist observer-narrator of *The Island of Dr Moreau*, notes that he lacks proof of Moreau's creation of 'humanized animals — triumphs of vivisection' (p. 77), but his status as a trained expert is enough to give the novel an air of scientific reportage. The narrative goes to great lengths to establish Edward as a reliable, educated observer. For example, he had, like Wells himself, 'spent some years at the Royal College of Science, and had done some research under Huxley' (p. 32). *Frankenstein* is another important early example of this technique, as even the frame story of Captain Walton, whom Victor meets in the Arctic as he nears death, is confirmed by the careful accuracy lent by Frankenstein's scientific training. 'Frankenstein discovered that I made notes concerning his history,' notes Walton, 'He asked to see them, and then himself corrected and augmented them in many places'.[133]

SF also thrives on the technological authority of the inventor, which can legitimate the engineered novums of a wide range of stories, without need for further explanation or justification. Luckhurst has shown that early American SF frequently profiled the inventor or engineer as a 'cultural hero', with longstanding repercussions for the genre post-Gernsback.[134]

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[132] Vint, pp. 314–15. Cf. Bould and Vint, p. 4.
[133] Shelley, p. 161.
[134] Luckhurst, *Science Fiction*, pp. 51–55.

Corelli's *Secret Power*, the only one of her novels based in America, casts Morgana and Roger in this inventor mould, legitimating fantastic technologies like Morgana's airship and Roger's bomb with a variety of science fictional rhetorical strategies, including appeals to naturalism and scientific discursivity, but also carefully constructing an unassailable social and epistemological status for the two scientists. Dimitrius's elixirs and radiant energy are similarly reinforced by his inventor persona.

All three, however, also represent the philosopher-scientist that Luckhurst argues was more common in the British context,[135] and which appears in all of Corelli's SF novels. From Heliobas to Morgana, Corelli's scientist heroes are trained in a wide spectrum of empirical methods and tend to possess knowledge (usually of the modernised ancient variety) with which they will soon revolutionise the entire scientific project. The techno-scientific authority of these characters adds implicit justification to otherwise unsubstantiable knowledge claims, creating verisimilitude for the alternate physics and speculative spiritual technologies of Corelli's science fiction. A similar effect occurs in other narratives where SF and occultism meet. The 'facts' of the mesmerist experience detailed in Poe's 'The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar' (1845) are laid down by a trained medical doctor; Fenwick's physiological approach to occultism is also justified by medical credentials; the presence of Sinnett's Professor Massilton is essential to the legitimacy of the psychical research which takes place at the Baron's castle.

Early SF is also, however, frequently reliant on the more contentious appeals to authority found in occult empiricism. Corelli's scientist heroes combine the authority of the trained scientist with that of the occult master. Dimitrius is not just a 'doctor of sciences' but also a 'master of innumerable secrets of nature' (*YD*, p. 249). Sinnett's *Karma* fictionalises the authority that could be drawn from contact with the Mahatmas. In Britten's *Ghost Land* we find a similar, also very common occult empiricist appeal to authority, the claim to receive knowledge from higher beings via mediumship.

Occultism's legitimation of knowledge via claims to social authority and individual experience could lend gravitas not just to characters and narrators, but to authors as well. The question of *who* provided testimony regarding supernormal events often motivated the paratextual strategies with which early SF authors injected their texts with verisimilitude. These authors commonly ceded the experiential authority for the events related in the novel to a third party. Where Corelli used paratext to shrink the distance between herself, her characters, and her fictionalised testimonies of experience, other authors used clearly fictional prefaces and introductions to introduce their observing and experiencing heroes as the authors of the text about to be read.

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[135] Ibid. p. 75.

Haggard's *She* is presented as the testimonial account of L. Horace Holly, with Haggard appearing to conflate himself with an 'Editor' character who also adds a map, weathered and etched with blood, and a facsimile of an ancient shard supposed to lead the novel's adventurers to the kingdom of Ayesha.[136] Percy Greg's *Across the Zodiac; The Story of a Wrecked Record*, an influential Martian voyage narrative, is presented as a found manuscript, as is Edgar Rice Burroughs's *A Princess of Mars* (1912). These are only a few examples of authors who consciously or unconsciously sought to increase the scientific affect of their narratives by connecting imagined events and novums to real-life experience. Perhaps more than any other genre of the period — though certainly not exclusively — early SF required a root story for the existence of the text itself, a justification for its existence that gives its travel narratives, its lost race encounters, its wondrous space flights, its strange psychical powers, the verisimilitude of personal encounter.

We have seen that Britten's *Ghost Land* deploys a similar paratextual strategy, but, as a result of her earnest desire to communicate and substantiate her spiritual science through fiction, significantly ups the ante.[137] Like the authors above, Britten attributed her novel to a third, experiencing party, but her decision to actively erase her authorial role, removing her name even from the book's cover and marketing materials, is more unique. Even this extensive attempt at verisimilitude can be found elsewhere, as in *The Realm of Light* (1908), written by John Stevens, but presented, both in a preface and on the novel's cover, as the true encounter of one Frank Hatfield with a lost race called the 'Zoeians', an ancient but technologically advanced people focused on spiritual development. Britten, however, upheld her authorial strategy epitextually as well in her tireless insistence on the Chevalier's authorship.[138] A full thirteen years after *Ghost Land*'s publication, she sent a letter to the editor of *Light*, haughtily refuting an allegation apparently made by none other than Madame Blavatsky in an earlier issue, doubting the existence of the Chevalier. Even at this much later point, Britten was 'at a loss to discover' why the Theosophical matriarch would feel the need to doubt her claims.[139] As with Corelli, this model of authorship very often convinced readers that they were engaged with an account of actual

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[136] See Saler, *As If*, pp. 64–85, on paratextual methods used by Haggard and others to feign objectivity in the 'new romance' novel of the 1880s and 1890s.

[137] See pp. 83–85.

[138] See, e.g., 'To the Editor of *The Banner of Light*', where Britten virulently insists that she is not, as *The Banner*'s reviewer has claimed, the author of *Ghost Land*.

[139] Britten, 'Letter to the Editor', p. 383. I have been unable to find the original letter from Blavatsky. Britten cites a 2 July edition of *Light*, but no such edition exists and issues released in a similar period do not contain letters from Blavatsky matching Britten's description. Deveney notes that Blavatsky was quite willing to recognise Louis as an occult authority in her early writings (*Paschal Beverly Randolph*, p. 268).

occult knowledge and experience; researchers from occult metaphysician G.R.S. Mead to Britten biographer Robert Mathiesen have gone looking for the real Louis.[140]

Britten's paratextual strategies were thus more successful than those of authors like Haggard and Poe, perhaps because of a generally higher level of credulity among her readership, but also because she was much more purposeful in supporting her peritextual claims epitextually. This determination to uphold the Chevalier's real-life existence was likely motivated by her most central purpose in creating the Chevalier and Dudley in the first place — an urge to create a verisimilitude that might convince readers of the real-world possibility of the novel's occult scientific concepts and technologies. The Chevalier substantiates Britten's novums through an occult empiricist claim to authority. Louis is an adept of the globally powerful Ellora Brotherhood, placing him on the same footing as occult masters like Tuitit and Serapis Bey, living 'masters' of the 'Ellora Section' of the 'Brotherhood of Luxor' from whom Olcott claimed to be receiving letters of occult instruction early in 1875, just months before the founding of the Theosophical Society.[141] Britten's framing of her Chevalier, which began as the first few chapters of the novel were serialised in *The Western Star* in 1872, may in fact have influenced some of the characteristics of the Mahatmas who began to communicate more and more frequently with Blavatsky's followers in the decade following.

In addition to the epistemological and social authority lent to her novel by the Chevalier, Britten also seems to have been working within a logic of objectivity similar to that expected of the trained scientist. Writing pseudonymously as 'Sirius' in *The Western Star*, Britten articulated a valuation of pseudonymity based on the inspiration of the spirits. Working as a trance lecturer for the past two decades, she had been attributing every thought and word to her spirit guides. Even as a political orator she claimed to speak 'without thought or volition of my own, and clearly prompted by some attendant intelligences'.[142] *The Western Star*, said 'Sirius', would follow a similar model, obscuring the identities of all authors in adherence to an unidentified and unexplained 'basic principle in the science of correspondences' revealed by the spirits.[143] While the Chevalier is an occult master, he is also a powerful medium, and his observations and experiences thus emerge as accounts of a reality beyond the lens of microscope or telescope, pure recordings of the 'unseen universe' provided by occult empiricism. In this vein, Britten also uses paratextual forums to insist that *Ghost Land* contains no elements of fiction. The Chevalier

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[140] Mathiesen, *Unseen Worlds of Emma Hardinge Britten*, pp. 21, 26–32. Waite relates that Mead believed Louis to be none other than Bulwer-Lytton (*Shadows*, p. 71). E.J. Dingwall also believed Louis to be an anonymised occult master (p. xvi).

[141] Godwin, *Theosophical Enlightenment*, pp. 290–91, 300.

[142] Britten, *Modern American Spiritualism*, p. 254. Cf. Godwin, *Theosophical Enlightenment*, p. 202.

[143] 'Britten, 'Salutatory', p. 6.

expresses a 'special dislike' for fiction, arguing that 'Spiritualistic narratives […] are simply degraded by fictional contrivances' (p. 18). Britten pre-empts any observations that the novel's situations and imagined technologies have uncanny similarities to established fictional tropes, worrying aloud that the events narrated 'are so TRUE' that those who are used to reading fiction will not recognise them as such (p. 12).

Corelli's inchoate mash of fiction and reality claimed a similar verisimilitude for the experiences depicted in her novels, but she reversed the current in which authors from Britten to Haggard attempted to distance the narration from themselves, while still presenting their novels as testimonies of actual experience. Corelli affected the authority of the occult scientific researcher for herself. The reciprocal relationship between author and text presented in her paratexts enabled her to strengthen the authority of both her authorial persona and authorial voice, thus ensuring a self-sustaining cycle which legitimised both her personal experiences and the (largely occult) knowledge she sought to communicate. Expressed in the form of the science fictional psychic creed, this knowledge flowed back out of fiction to validate experience and strengthen her public persona as a religio-scientific commentator. Corelli paralleled these paratextual strategies by positioning herself as *paranarrator* as well, blurring her authorial voice together with didactic statements put in the mouths of main characters, or allowing the reader to draw direct links between the narratorial view and the identity of the author, between the experiences of characters like the Electric Woman, Diana, and Morgana and her own psychic past. Jill Galvan argues, correctly I think, that this strategy amounts to an exploitation of narration, a 'medium for creative self-disguise' similar to her retouched portraits.[144]

Corelli thus took advantage of assumptions about the role of the author that were quite different from a post-modern posture of readership, particularly post-Barthes. Bulwer argued that works of fiction so clearly emerge from the perspective and experiences of the author that they can be used as 'an appendix to [a writer's] biography', one that can actually be more valuable than other autobiographical or biographical materials.[145] While such a claim might sound ludicrous in our own time, Haggard reported receiving letters from fans who believed that *King Solomon's Mines* (1885) was a true account, while Doyle received similar letters about Sherlock Holmes.[146] As we have seen, responses to Corelli's paratextual claims to be writing her science fictional novels out of her own personal experience were often similar. Readers and critics, accustomed to reading the author as, in Barthes' terms, 'the past of his own book',[147] were

[144] Galvan, p. 97.
[145] Bulwer-Lytton, 'Difference between Authors', pp. 23–24.
[146] Saler, *As If*, p. 61.
[147] Barthes, p. 145.

convinced by Corelli's constructed authorial persona. Critic David Christie Murray dismissed the ideas behind her creed as 'old and commonplace', but observed that her creed had 'real force' with the 'ordinary reader' because of her 'inward conviction of the authority of her own message and her own power to deliver it'.[148] Corelli's establishment of authority through affected earnestness and a claim to personal experience was therefore an important element in her efforts to lend her psychic science the verisimilitude required for the legitimate consideration of her imaginal physics.

Corelli's paratexts thus create an ouroboros of legitimation, in which the supposedly true to life events of the text substantiate the persona and experience of the author, which in turn uphold the verisimilitude of the text. The paratextual acts of Britten and Corelli likely diluted the fictional nature of their novels for many readers. The value of personal truth claims for both legitimating occult belief and establishing science fictional verisimilitude was sensed by mid-nineteenth-century popular historian Elihu Rich, who, justifying the 'affirmative language' of some of the entries in an 1855 *Occult Sciences* compendium, argued that even the 'severest judge' might agree that 'certain facts lose their significance, and even their literary value, unless related with the air of a believer.'[149] Later narratological findings support this assumption. Researchers have discovered that the brain patterns of readers who are paratextually informed that they are reading a factual narrative are different from those who believe they have encountered fiction. Fiction reading prompts hypothetical, simulative activity in the brain, while the belief that we are reading fact triggers 'autobiographical memory retrieval' — an attempt to fit the information being processed with previous experience.[150] Much depends, therefore, on how a reader is prepared before encountering a text. Even readers for whom a text remains clearly fictional at all levels might experience an increased sense of verisimilitude as a result of the author's claim to be communicating actual fact and experience beneath a superficial gauze of scene and character.

Given this reader tendency, it is thus worth considering whether science fiction has, or at least can have, a unique author-function — a relationship between author, reader, and text not found in other literary forms. Corelli's method of establishing verisimilitude by claiming to possess scientific knowledge gained through occult experience suggests that this may be so for at least some forms of science fiction, particularly those most in dialogue with scientific concepts. Most of the critical attention paid to Darko Suvin's definition of SF has focused on the entanglement of 'cognition' and 'estrangement' and just what is meant by those terms. There is

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[148] Murray, pp. 151–52.
[149] Rich, np.
[150] Altmann and others, p. 25.

another aspect of Suvin's full definition that has received less debate, however, perhaps because it seems so obvious. This stipulates that science fiction's 'main formal device is an imaginative framework alternative to the author's empirical environment.'[151] A first, cynical reaction to this statement might be that Suvin himself did not exactly take advantage of the historical sensitivity enabled by this statement — he seems to dismiss a number of works of Victorian SF, including several Corelli novels, based on their perceived incompatibility with the scientific knowledge and assumptions of his own time, rather than that of the author's context. More importantly for my current discussion, however, Suvin's quite correct and indeed banal observation about the act of othering, dissimilar projection, and worlding that constitutes the estrangement of science fictional writing places the author, as much as the text or reader, at the centre of interpretation. The text remains a thing-in-itself, but when received or evaluated as science fiction it is forever influenced by its contextual relationship with its author's subjective perspective of their own cultural and epistemological environment. As has been the case with Corelli, whose fictionalisations of mesmerist, Spiritualist, and Theosophical science will naturally have seemed less rooted in authentic scientific debate with each proceeding generation, readers who are disassociated — or critics who disassociate themselves — from Corelli's original context *and* her unique, scientised readings of spiritual and supernatural phenomena, can actually be removed from a science fictional mode of reading and interpretation.

Thus, though Stephen Hrotic has argued that science fiction is particularly *disassociated* from its author because of its tendency to imagine 'possible worlds' rather than 'the world as we see it',[152] I would argue, quite to the contrary, that the author's interior absorption, interpretation, and adaptation of scientific knowledge — their uniquely subjective perspective on the epistemological context of their own time — is one of the most important elements in receiving a text as science fictional. The author is a crucial quotient in a formula that involves a varying combination of author, text, reader, epistemological context, and time. Very often this quotient has a paratextual function: the name of the author, for example, can influence the science fictionality of a text. A novel by Kim Stanley Robinson is very likely to end up on the SF shelf, while a Jonathan Lethem or Thomas Pynchon text will only ever be putatively enfolded into the SF mega-text or canon.

The influential fiction of H.G. Wells is again an instructive example of the manner in which the author could paratextually add verisimilitude to fiction. We have seen that Wells frequently relied on the perspective of the scientist hero to render impossible technologies like crystal scrying in an empiricist light. As with Corelli, however, Wells's authorial persona helped to reinforce the

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[151] Suvin, ' Poetics of the Science Fiction Genre', p. 375.
[152] Hrotic, p. 17.

empiricist illusion of his fiction. Though he only trained as a biologist for a year, he was respected in this capacity and even put his name to a biology textbook that is still in print today. This perceived expertise was magnified by the scientific knowledge apparent in his fiction, in much the same reciprocal exchange of life and fiction that we see in Corelli's oeuvre. As a result of widely selling science fictional visions of the future like *The Time Machine* and *A Modern Utopia* (1905), Wells was able to establish himself as a globally recognised prophet of the future who had tasked himself with envisioning a scientifically guided utopia for humankind. This reputation, of course, fed back into later novels such as *Men Like Gods* (1923). In decades following, the verisimilitude of science fiction continued to be frequently upheld by the education, experience, and training of authors, some of them, most famously Isaac Asimov, practicing scientists. Over time this technique of legitimation through persona and perspective became less important — the narratorial perspective in SF following the New Wave tends to be just as unreliable as any other form of fiction, and the percentage of SF produced by trained scientists is now quite low relative to earlier periods.

Science fiction has also played host to permeable relationships between author and text similar to those of Corelli, Britten, and Sinnett. This phenomenon has received very little attention from SF critics, which is surprising given that, in addition to these early examples of author-affected science fiction, the genre also enfolds authors like Philip K. Dick, Kurt Vonnegut, and J.G. Ballard, all of whom placed themselves — or shards of themselves — as characters inside their fiction. Dick is an exception to the tendency to look past the author, as critics have been quite interested in the permeability between his late science fiction and a set of experiences he called '2-3-74', a series of visionary events which occurred in February and March of 1974 (months 2 and 3 of 74).[153] *VALIS* (1981), the most developed exploration of these experiences, is built around dozens of science fictionally presented explanations for 2-3-74, including psychosis, drug usage, and the telepathic influence of three-eyed aliens, of humans from the past and future, or of a satellite (VALIS), possibly controlled by human inhabitants of a far-off planet. The novel features two characters that are clear reflections of Dick himself: SF author Phil and his friend Horselover Fat, later revealed as a psychological projection of Phil — a smaller Russian doll inside the authorial representation already constituted by Phil himself. The two see a film called *VALIS* with their friend Kevin, wherein they discover that someone else seems to have shared their mystic experiences, framed in the film as an encounter with a satellite that fires a pink beam of tech-gnostic information — an unsolicited download of enormous volumes of true knowledge. Fat conflates the film with his own experience; Phil isn't so sure about the satellite theory: '"You

[153] See Kripal, *Mutants and Mystics*, pp. 269–89; Broderick, *Transrealist Fiction*, p. 137; Palmer, pp. 223–37.

don't think it really is an information satellite, do you?" I said. "That fired a beam at Fat?"' 'No,' Kevin responds, 'that's a sci-fi film device, a sci-fi way of explaining it' (p. 154). Not only is SF presented as a way of approaching the ineffability and mystery of Dick/Phil/Fat's experience, it is also, Kevin worries, shaping their recollection and interpretation of it: 'The goddam film may be […] firing all kinds of information at us, visually and auditorily' (p. 156). Here Dick makes plain his science fictional method for both processing and explaining psychical experience. *VALIS* is thus both an exploration of experience *and* of the relationship between narrative and experience.

Dick's blending of his own occult empiricist experience into fiction is accomplished without peritext, though he added a variety of epitextual clarifications and interpretations of both the novel and his experiences, most notably his 8,000-page *Exegesis*. Indeed, the general use in science fiction of peritextual elements like pseudonyms, false prefaces, and documentary evidence seems to have faded over time. The span of Corelli's career illustrates this shift, as the paratextual strategies of her earlier novels are completely absent from *Young Diana* and *Secret Power*. Arthur Conan Doyle's science fictional exploration of telepathy and spirit-communication in *The Land of Mist* (1925–1926) and *The Maracot Deep* (1927–1928) emerged from his devout belief in the scientific validity of Spiritualism, and their occult scientific knowledge claims are held up by the testimony of scientific authorities like the famous Professor Challenger. Doyle, however, made no attempt to add to the veracity of his occult technologies via paratextual appeals to experience or authority, though certainly many readers would have been aware that he claimed to possess both. There are later examples of hoax fiction — readers took Arthur Machen's 'The Bowmen' (1914) as a true account of trench warfare by the spectral bowmen of Agincourt,[154] and Orson Welles famously convinced millions that Martians were invading with a radio rendition of Wells's *War of the Worlds* — but later audiences, perhaps more saturated with popular culture and therefore more aware of the vagaries of fiction, do not seem to have been so easily persuaded to blend fiction with the experiences of the author. The presentation of fiction as a higher way of knowing and communicating, and the potential for its reception as autobiography or scientific reportage thus seem to have been more fertile terrain for earlier science fiction than for later texts.

Science fiction's encounter with occult empiricism did, however, produce lasting rhetorical and stylistic effects. The narratorial voice of later science fiction is rarely relied upon to explicitly validate knowledge, and that voice is less likely to be that of an engineer or trained scientist. Yet, occult empiricism's claim to be able to create scientific knowledge from subjective experience and, most crucially, to provide evidence of these experiences in the form of testimony, lies at the

[154] See Worth, p. xxi.

core of a genre that continues to claim new scientific possibilities based entirely on the testimony of a range of voices that, within their self-contained realms, are held to be authoritative, even when they would be greeted as unstable or insane in our empirically normative reality, and even when they are witnessing psychical and spiritual events we hold to be supernatural and implausible.

Conclusion: the mediative Corelli

Corelli's texts also provide a register in which, among many other shifting currents, it is possible to see a movement in science fiction away from the earnestness of earlier nineteenth-century authors like Poe, Britten, Bulwer, and Sinnett. She followed such authors in mining occultist techniques for seeking scientific legitimacy, but did so with the instincts of a canny fiction writer interested in narrative potential, rather than the passions of a devout occult theorist. Though actual belief and a perception of personal experience seem to have underpinned the psychic creed, ultimately it amounts to a novum much like any other found in science fiction, the basis for an alternate world from which the assumptions of conventional empiricist science can be teasingly tested. By claiming a much more earnest and direct relationship between her life and fiction than actually existed, Corelli followed in an already extant tradition represented by authors like Bulwer and Britten, but helped to lay the groundwork for a consciously fictional SF mode, most famously developed and deployed by Wells, which followed occultism in dialoguing with empirical method and emulating empiricist structures, substantiating astounding, supernormal phenomena with the individual testimony of the trained authority.

Corelli's fiction thus proved mediative in three separate senses: first, it negotiated between the sometimes oppositional instincts of savvy entertainer and earnest spiritual scientist; second, and as a result, Corelli's fiction helped transport the earnest authorial techniques of some of her contemporaries into a more consciously fictional method. It is hard to gauge the exact impact of this mediation on later SF writers, but we can almost certainly draw a line from Corelli's novels, particularly *Secret Power*, to Victor MacClure's *The Ark of the Covenant: A Romance of the Air and of Science*, published three years later in 1924. In MacClure's novel an occult master has formed a secret society similar to the Brotherhood of Heliobas and Santoris, dedicated to world peace. Like Roger Seaton of *Secret Power*, a Master named 'Seton' has discovered the secret of atomic power through an alchemical physics and seeks to apply it for peaceful purposes. Aside from such direct impact, it is hard to see how other SF authors of Corelli's time, a period in which she was for a couple of decades the Anglosphere's most popular author, could not have encountered her novels and been influenced by them, thereby absorbing the occult-infused tropes and rhetorics that were in the process of coalescing behind a recognisable SF mode. A third mediative function

reversed this movement from occultism into SF. Corelli was so successful in the creation of verisimilitude that her fiction acted as an important forum for the mediation of occult knowledge from the nineteenth century into the twentieth. Occultists from Ralph Shirley to H. Spencer Lewis were convinced that her fiction represented a sincere statement of esoteric knowledge and experience.[155] Though Corelli did not design her novels as esoteric texts, in her canny efforts to make occult knowledge and experience verisimilar and establish herself as the founder and prophet of the psychic creed, she became an important figure in the history of modern esotericism.

[155] Shirley; Lewis, p. 179.

Chapter Five

Occultism and the Mega-Text

The examples of Bulwer, Britten, and Corelli show the dynamic interactions that emerged from the shared motivations and legitimation strategies of occultism and early science fiction. Their work illustrates the extent to which SF and occultism could support and shape each other as esoteric thinkers and authors of fiction modernised ancient knowledge, exploited the hypothetical status of certain areas of scientific research, legitimated marginal theories and concepts with appeals to discourse over fact, naturalised the supernatural, appealed to the experiential data of occult empiricism, and mimicked the social actions of scientific claims to authority. In this chapter, I want to expand the scope of my analysis thus far to argue that these shared motivations defined the way in which both SF and occultism are identified and revealed, not just for esoterically-inclined authors, and not just for those working in the nineteenth century, but for both SF writers and occultists then and since.

The impact of SF on occultism will continue to feature in this chapter, but I want to most specifically focus on the impact of modern esoteric science on the way in which SF presents itself, how it reveals itself as a unique, codified genre or modern technoscientific way of thinking. I want to argue that in contrast to the picture of SF that results from attempts to exorcise the magical and supernatural from its narrative fabric, the nineteenth-century collision with the rhetorics and epistemologies of occultism proved fundamental for SF as both genre and mode, an influence that can be traced in texts produced at all times since, sometimes explicitly, but more often in a manner so occluded that authors, readers, and critics are now likely to see devices that would once have been viewed, breathlessly, as magic or miracle, as ‘pure science fiction’.

I want to shift the balance of my attention to the influence of occultism on science fiction, rather than vice versa, because science fiction has emerged as the more dominant cultural form. The SF that was developed in this early period has become more than a textual or generic phenomenon. Science fiction is now one of the primary modes of thinking and experiencing with which residents of industrialised cultures encounter and shape the world — a framework for analysis and projection with which to interpret facts and events within the episteme structured by enframing. Thus, in addition to continuing to provide insight into the development of both SF and occultism, this chapter will further analyse the way in which occultism has imprinted itself on the SF mode. It will illustrate that the way in which we think about the future, evaluate new technologies, image apocalypse, or encounter unknown entities and experiences, is embedded in a longstanding dialogue between SF and esoteric knowledge, a dialectic with deep roots in the nineteenth century.

There would be no SF mode without intertextual development and transmission, however, which is why this project has engaged with individual texts at the same time as it has evaluated them in historical and epistemological context. When considering the textual basis of SF it can be valuable to think in terms of Broderick's mega-text, a consensually established code formed by 'imaginary worlds, tropes, tools, lexicons, even grammatical innovations' that contributes to receiving a text as science fictional.[1] The mega-text concept is not perfect. There are, first of all, legitimate questions surrounding just *who* is perceived as worthy of contributing to it. Broderick attributes this role to 'acknowledged sf writers' (p. xiii), thus limiting SF's boundaries on a social, rather than purely textual level. The editors of *The Wesleyan Anthology of Science Fiction* significantly widen participation in the formation of the mega-text to encapsulate the networking that frequently goes on between SF authors, readers, and fans, on-line or at conventions and other gatherings, which they identify as a residue of the 'twentieth-century history of publication in specialized or niche formats such as pulp magazines, mass-market paperbacks, and sf digests'.[2] For the current period, however, even this may be too limited. There are few people left on Earth who have not in some way interacted with the tropes, devices, and expectations of science fiction. Some of these, like the UFO and the extra-terrestrial, have long since left the womb of their development in science fiction, to become everyday archetypal aspects of the human imagination. Wherever they are found, whether in UFO cults or on the back of a cereal box, they retain a vestigial connection to science fiction, but it is questionable whether they require familiarity with the mega-text to be read that way.

A second problem with the mega-text is thus the subjectivity of its identification. Of what value is a corpus of images, concepts, and stylistics that takes a multitude of forms relative to each individual reader? This problem is particularly salient when considering the mega-textual significance of early SF. Regardless of the way in which a particular text dialogues with contemporaneous intellectual debate, enfolds scientific discursivity, appeals to empirical method, or claims naturalistic verisimilitude for fantastic devices — all key elements, as we have seen, of the SF mode — the 'code' of the mega-text requires a degree of communal recognition of that text's importance for it to be considered mega-textually significant. This is one element in a general problem of temporality which the concept faces. Though the *Wesleyan Anthology* editors allow that the mega-text 'includes all the sf stories that have ever been told' (p. xiii), most critics are more selective. Broderick, for example, sees it as something 'built up over fifty years, even a century, of mutually imbricated sf texts'.[3] However, reducing the mega-text to the shared

[1] Broderick, *Reading by Starlight*, p. xiii.
[2] Evans and others, p. xiii.
[3] Broderick, *Reading by Starlight*, p. 59.

memory of the recent present elides the ongoing subjective transmutation of genre. We cannot, therefore, take the concept very far toward objectivity. Even if a single mega-textual object were to actually emerge from a grand author-reader-critic consensus, it would immediately be destroyed upon the next act of publication, definition, or historical criticism.

The concept of the mega-text thus contains an inherent, destabilising contradiction: though it is predicated on the tropes and 'language-functions' unique to SF,[4] the emphasis on author-reader textual experience overrides awareness of the *origins* of both image and language. If we restore a *longue durée*, historical focus on the tropes and assumptions that result in the perception of a text or mode as science fictional, however, the mega-text can still provide a productive framework for understanding the evolution of SF. This more comprehensive approach would necessarily focus as much on the intertextuality as on the sociality of genre. As formulated by theorists like Broderick, Delany, and Roberts, the mega-text is useful for understanding the experience of reading and interpreting genres like SF. However, in order to be useful either for understanding SF historically — that is, beyond current reader memory — or in its wider, contemporary sense as a globally significant form of thinking, the mega-text needs to be reformulated in terms of texts themselves, rather than reader reception or author intention.

Returning to the texts themselves invokes a literary take on 'Actor-Network Theory', a sociological approach developed by Bruno Latour and others which, similar to the mega-text, views as its field of study a comprehensive web of both human and nonhuman actors, all continuously engaged in complex processes of social formation and disintegration. Individual humans or objects in an 'actor-network' never act alone, but are part of an incomprehensible array of influences and ideas. 'Action is borrowed, distributed, suggested, influenced, dominated, betrayed, translated.'[5] For Latour, actors in the network are important for researchers only when they contribute to new network associations or when they transform their own nature. The same might be said of conventional views of the mega-text — a text is only mega-textually active so long as it is not forgotten, so long as it plays a role in the conveyance of images and language or the generation of new forms. However, even inactive, non-social objects can regain their agency: 'When objects have receded into the background for good, it is always possible […] to bring them back to light by using archives, documents, memoirs, museum collections, etc., to artificially

[4] Delany, *Triton*, p. 333.

[5] Latour, p. 46. For more on ANT see Michael; Jackson. I have previously argued the usefulness of ANT for evaluating the interrelationship of human and non-human actors in the study of esotericism and fiction. See Roukema, esp. pp. 16–20.

produce, through historians' accounts, the state of crisis in which machines, devices, and implements were born.'[6]

Reconstituting the textual actions and interrelationships of nineteenth-century SF allows us to see a form of mega-text already building in the period. This mega-text was of a different category than later assemblages; the shape of its language, tropes, and knowledge was somewhat different from later periods, and it was not as large, as consciously intertextual, or as homogeneous. Yet, as early as 1851 the narrator of Whiting's *Heliondé* takes the time to place his journey to the Sun in the context of Solar voyages imagined in previous myths, folkloric tales, and antique writings. Whiting imagined a method of transport unique to the nineteenth century and its strange sciences, as his narrator's body is made more etheric by a combination of exposure to sun and hydropathy, or the 'water-cure' (p. 17), and thus floats spirit-like into space.[7] The author imagined this fantastic method of travel after reading an essay written by none other than Bulwer-Lytton.[8] The vast length of Bulwer's cultural shadow in the period is indicated again by Gustavus W. Pope's narrator in *Journey to Mars*. Here Lieutenant Hamilton meets Martians at the South Pole and immediately turns to a blend of scientific and science fictional sources to explain these non-human beings: 'They might be elbow cousins to Bulwer's "Vril-ya," or an evolution from Verne's centre earth anthropoid apes, or astronomer Halley's hollow globe denizens' (p. 76–77). Pope situates his character's meeting with extra-terrestrials within a pre-existing framework of alien encounter, a mega-textual constellation of literary and intellectual actors that had already contributed to a cultural awareness of what Pope's preface calls 'the scientific novel'. As David Seed argues, the use of this term clearly indicates that SF was taking on an individual genre identity in the period.[9]

As the SF mode came into the conscious, mega-textual awareness of authors and readers, it was also establishing rhetorical strategies of legitimation such as its appeal to scientific discourse and authority, and solidifying tropes like space travel, the extra-terrestrial, and psychic powers. To understand how SF took on the twentieth- and twenty-first-century forms with which we are more familiar, it is essential to assess the degree to which nineteenth-century SF predates, influences, or formulates the images, motivations, and techniques of later mega-textual samples. It could be argued that there has been no more influential era for the shape of the mega-text, however fluid and subjectively defined, than the mid to late nineteenth century, despite the obscurity, from our present perspective, of many of its actors. We have seen that occult symbols

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[6] Latour, p. 81. ANT is largely concerned with the actor-network function of technological objects, but this can include texts, considered as 'intellectual technologies' (pp. 74–78).

[7] Whiting, pp. 8–9.

[8] 'Confessions of a Water Patient', *New Monthly Magazine*, 1845.

[9] Seed, *Science Fiction*, p. 117.

and concepts played a significant role in developing these tropes and strategies. Thus, the archival process of reconstituting early SF actors reveals the vestigial presence, in science fiction as a whole, of both occult fiction and the strange sciences from which it came.

In the remainder of this chapter I will continue this dissertation's archival archaeology by highlighting four more areas of intersection between SF and occultism — 1) a shared gothic influence, 2) a heterotopian ability to mediate between binaries, 3) a potential for reanimation of the human self and species in a disenchanted world, and 4) a productive relationship between serious and playful approaches to occult phenomena. I will then unearth indicative examples of dialogue between early SF texts and occultist movements, particularly the three traditions that most commonly entangled with science fiction: mesmerism, Spiritualism, and Theosophy. Finally, I will explore two further areas of intersection, a fascination with the powers of the mind suggested by contemporaneous mental physiology, and a productive engagement with the 'others' of enframing. Against the backdrop of the mutual engagement of SF and occultism with mental science and alterity, I will argue that modern esotericism provided the root matter of several key SF tropes, including telepathy, ESP, space travel, alternate dimensions, and the extra-terrestrial.

SF, occultism, and the gothic

SF always intermingles with other genres and modes. This was particularly the case in the early period with which I am concerned, when there was no sense of generic purity, even in cases when authors like Whiting, Bulwer, and Pope worked consciously within an extant tradition of scientific fiction. As discussed in my introductory chapter, however, SF authors, readers, and critics have often prescriptively identified SF as something quite distinct from genres perceived to reflect non-rational, supernatural, or magical ontologies. This is a further problem with the mega-text concept, as thinking in terms of a textual corpus bound by shared narrative expectations, imagery, linguistics, plotlines, or tropes bears the risk of reinforcing prescriptive approaches. Certainly, a gap can be easily identified, even in this early period, between scientific romance and forms like folklore and the fairy-tale. It is not difficult to distinguish the acausal, symbolic plot of works of fantasy like George MacDonald's *Phantastes* (1858) from the scientific verisimilitude and claim to empirical method that structure Sinnett's *Karma*, regardless of any ontological similarities the two novels might ultimately share. Other literary forms, however, were much more closely entangled with SF in the period, and their influence, like that of occultism, is still operative today.

As already discussed, SF's taste for the verisimilar was borrowed, in part, from realism and literary naturalism. It owes just as much, however, to the romance novel.[10] A number of scholars have argued that the 'New Romance' novel of the 1880s and 1890s was particularly crucial to SF's emergence.[11] Influential critics of the period, including Andrew Lang and George Saintsbury, argued, in the latter's words, that recent authors like R.L. Stevenson and H. Rider Haggard had 'revived the romance' by injecting it with the 'local peculiarities of thought and feeling' of the realist novel, which had itself 'got rather into a rut'.[12] Popular texts like Haggard's *She*, which legitimates the supernatural powers and lifespan of Ayesha with a variety of science fictional strategies, including the paratextual inclusion of photographs of a fake antique stele, would certainly have informed the genre's development,[13] but authors like Whiting and Bulwer had already been consciously following this recipe, as seen in Bulwer's decision to 'borrow from science some elements of interest for Romance'.

The 'new romance' was also rooted squarely in the already century-old gothic tradition. Many critics have observed that SF shares this debt to the 'explained supernatural' of the gothic, in which ghosts, witchcraft, and demonic forces seem to emerge from an immaterial, spiritual realm, but are reduced to material explanations by the end of the narrative.[14] Brian Aldiss's case for *Frankenstein* as SF's ur-text is built on Shelley's use of this technique to transport Victor's monster from the Hermetic supernatural to the successful conclusion of various laboratory experiments with electricity, vitalism, and animal magnetism.[15] Virtually all of the texts discussed in this dissertation have similar gothic elements, from Bulwer's scientised demonology in a *Strange Story* to the chilling mesmeric control which Corelli's El-Râmi exercises over the soul of Lilith. In each of these examples we see esoteric materials acting as vehicles for a gothic irruption of the supernatural into the natural, and inspiring gothic terror. This is a familiar relationship. As I have argued elsewhere, the gothic and the occult have existed as closely joined complex cultural concepts for two-and-a-half centuries, adapting and shaping each other, in multitudinous manifestations of symbol, form, and concept.[16]

The influence of the gothic is thus another area in which SF and occultism intersected. Occultism could help transport the tropes and stylistics of the gothic into SF, as in the texts above, but it could also be the lever that switched the genre train onto a science fictional track. Bulwer's scenes of unexplained magic and demonology initially emphasise a gothic appeal to

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[10] See Parrinder, *Science Fiction*, pp. 48–67; Rose, pp. 8–9.
[11] See, e.g., Saler, *As If*, pp. 14–15, 59–60; Dryden, pp. 21–22.
[12] Saintsbury, p. 404.
[13] As argued by Saler, *As If*, p. 15; James, 'Science Fiction by Gaslight', pp. 32–33.
[14] See Nelson, pp. 3, 6. On SF and the gothic, see Brantlinger, 'Gothic Origins'.
[15] Aldiss and Wingrove, pp. 16–18.
[16] Roukema, pp. 128–31.

emotion and sensation, particularly of a horrific variety, but they are tamed into a theory of telepathy that reduces the supernatural to something in 'the legitimate realm of physiology'. El-Râmi's magical mesmerism has the cold, manipulative feel of the gothic, and ultimately the supernatural overwhelms him as he comes face to face with Lilith's soul at the novel's climax, but these currents are countervailed by his frequent return to 'the inquisitorial research' of the occult scientist (p. 300). Despite warnings against the dangers of Hermetic philosophers like Agrippa, Victor's knowledge of magic, animal magnetism, and alchemy contributes to the vitalisation of his monster in *Frankenstein*. *She* shifts into an SF mode in a similar fashion, as Haggard places supernatural phenomena like immortality, reincarnation, and mind control within an empirically consistent framework, relying heavily on the epistemology of occult science to do so. The magic of Ayesha is presented as a future technology; she is merely harnessing as-yet-undiscovered occult forces in a practiced science similar to magical mesmerism. Haggard's narrator, Holly, is constantly analysing his experiences with Ayesha, placing them within a scientific framework in a manner similar to Bulwer's Fenwick and Britten's Chevalier.

In all of these texts, dialogue with scientific knowledge and method is centrally mediated by occultism. We have seen that Bulwer's Fenwick maintains his identity as trained scientist throughout *Strange Story*, but shifts from 'sceptic, philosopher, materialist' to serious consideration of previously rejected explanations for once inconceivable phenomena. This shift emerges from Bulwer's stated purpose for writing the novel: to make scientists inquire into the phenomena of mesmerism and Spiritualism 'as I think Bacon, Newton, and Davy would have inquired. There must be a natural cause for them — if they are not purely imposture.'[17] This is an axis on which many texts of the period blur out of the gothic toward SF. The methods and findings of occult science allow such novels to deploy the 'explained supernatural' inherited from the gothic, while at the same time challenging and adapting dominant scientific methods and paradigms within an epistemological structure that, despite its dislike of materialism, continued to uphold the essential value of rationalism and empiricism.

Crucially, however, at the same time as it emerged as a gothic form with a more flexible and conscious response to the currents of enframing, science fiction continued to relish an inextricable relationship with its generic cousin. As this dissertation has shown, some SF authors consciously sought out esoteric knowledge, sometimes generating science fiction in the course of advocating occult scientific concepts, or even, as in the case of Wells, in the process of satirising them. However, SF authors also had access to pre-existing gothic texts and tropes which had already taken advantage of the epistemological strategies and imaginative concepts of occultism,

[17] Edward Bulwer-Lytton to John Forster, 3 December 1861, *Life*, II, 47.

and would thus have been able to incorporate esoteric concepts without much knowledge of their background. Haggard's Ayesha is a likely example of this approach, as she is clearly conceived in the vein of earlier near-Eastern immortals like the Chaldean mages of Bulwer's *Zanoni*. Indeed, Haggard's novel is quite Bulwerian in its gothic style and occult interests, reflecting the influence of Lord Lytton noted in Chapter Two. Yet, the two novels differ in their dialogical stance toward scientific knowledge and method, a result, most likely, of the growing call to ordering of enframing that caused Bulwer to adjust his own authorial strategies in his later occult fantasies. *Zanoni* occasionally waves lazily at scientific legitimation, but it is ultimately concerned with metaphysics; its occult concepts and events remain largely unexplained. It is Haggard's determination to establish scientific verisimilitude, rather than the content or themes of the novel itself, that shifts *She* away from the gothic and toward SF. Thus, regardless of where authors encountered the occult, or how intentional they were about its reproduction, occultism's unique approach to science was often integral to the creation of verisimilitude, a function that proved essential to the rhetorics of nineteenth-century SF, and continues to do so today. The imagery of the magical and spectral continued to sustain both the gothic and science fiction, but the latter adopted the methods and legitimation strategies of occultism as well, significantly impacting its growing reception as a distinct genre marked by the cognitive effect of scientific verisimilitude.

Heterotopia

Established, however haphazardly, around the 'explained supernatural' of the gothic, SF has always explored the liminal spaces between poles of known and mysterious, scientific and religious. Where Romantic currents like the gothic tended, though certainly not exclusively, to highlight the monstrosity of technological change and the sterility of materialism, early science fiction authors provided industrialised cultures with more nuanced ways to think about, and experience, the rapid technological change and epistemological upheaval of enframing. This position between post-Enlightenment divisions of reason and imagination, matter and spirit, is rooted in SF's engagement with esotericism, particularly occult science. Both traditions developed out of a similar response to the growing dominance of enframing, one that welcomed the episteme ushered in by naturalism, empiricism, and positivism, but sought to ameliorate the reductionism often resultant from these approaches, enfolding the magical and supernatural within protective cocoons formed of scientific discourse and affectations to empirical method.

This exploration of the messy, overlapping equatorial regions between dichotomised poles of magic and science is connected to a wider characteristic that SF and occultism developed in tandem in the nineteenth century. Both have emerged as knowledge forms of what Michel

Foucault calls 'heterotopia'. Foucault's works only briefly refer to the concept,[18] and it is loosely conceptualised, verging, perhaps fittingly, on the contradictory. The term thus opens itself to a disparity of interpretations and applications. Foucault conceived of heterotopia in terms of spaces — mirrors, cinemas, moving trains — that are independent structures but allow other, more distinct places to overlap, thus mediating between them. This has proven a useful metaphor for those in search of a way to describe and assess phenomena that mediate the characteristics of apparently opposing concepts, institutions, or social systems.[19] Scholars have also understood cultural forms as capable of a heterotopian function. SF theorists can be found among them, most influentially Delany, who considers the heterotopian potential of SF both fictionally and non-fictionally in *Triton: An Ambiguous Heterotopia* (1976).[20]

Indeed, science fiction and occultism both possess notably heterotopian characteristics. In mediating between non-contiguous, often opposed spaces, heterotopias may either carry ideas from one unconnected node to another — like a ship or a train — or actually be constituted of overlapping spaces, as on a theatre stage where several disparate locations can be reproduced and allowed to merge and interact. SF and occultism perform both functions in mediating post-Enlightenment binaries. They transfer knowledge between systems perceived to be in opposition to each other, and in doing so allow polarisations like magic and science to retain their epistemic legitimacy even while actually continuing to exist in messy relationship, becoming virtually indistinguishable at overlapping points such as the methodology of occult empiricism. Both SF and occultism have performed this function between a wide variety of dichotomies — socialist and capitalist, European and non-European, exterior and interior.

In the nineteenth century, however, both currents were primarily concerned with mediating scientific and religious concepts between poles of spirit and matter, supernatural and natural, with the effect of prompting scientific spiritualities like Theosophy, or supernatural sciences like psychical research and the efforts of the Vril-ya Club. The heterotopian action of one could motivate the other: novelists like Bulwer, Britten, and Corelli produced science fiction from out of their interest in occultism's ability for epistemic mediation. Critic James Douglas charged that Corelli's novels were popular because they possessed a single-minded naiveté that appealed to 'the national hunger for the obvious',[21] but in fact what may have appealed most to readers is Corelli's attempt, admittedly often clumsy, to harmonise a variety of apparently conflicting

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[18] Foucault, *Order of Things*, p. xix; Foucault, 'Different Spaces', pp. 175–85. The latter is a talk given to the Cercle d'études architecturales (Architectural Study Circle), Paris, 14 March 1967.

[19] See, e.g., Ophir and Shapin, pp. 13–16. Unsurprisingly, given Foucault's extensive theorisations concerning the construction of knowledge, scholars have seen the potential in applying heterotopia to knowledge spaces in addition to social locations, as Foucault himself does in *The Order of Things* (p. xix).

[20] See, e.g., Fletcher, pp. 88–89; Suvin, 'Where Are We?', pp. 209–10.

[21] Douglas, p. 381.

currents. In order to achieve this harmonisation, both SF writers and occultists (and those who were both) could most commonly be found exploring the boundaries of apparently distinct spheres like science and religion, searching for overlap. It was in these margins that both discovered (or imagined) the strange sciences of occultism and psychical research. The bleeding together of such boundaries has long generated science fiction. As Csicsery-Ronay argues, in cultures where technoscience has achieved virtual epistemic hegemony, SF emerges from attempts to scientifically justify a variety of 'phenomena at the limits of conceptualization: the state and fate of the universe, the essence of life, the nature of consciousness, the composition of reality, the potentials of human civilizational self-construction.'[22]

Cultural heterotopias thus both shape and subvert boundaries between dichotomies like religion and science. They can perform this function because they are marginal by definition. Indeed, Foucault characterises heterotopias as places in which society confines its deviants.[23] This has clear implications for occultism, a diverse formation of modern religious and/or scientific concepts and traditions that often have little in common but their rejection by both scientific and religious poles. Science fiction is not usually defined in terms of rejected knowledge, but, as this dissertation has shown, it has found much generative value in marginalised and radical knowledge claims, and has in fact used esoteric sciences like mesmerism and psychical research to fulfil a heterotopian mediation between various poles defined by the tension between science and religion.

SF thus performs, as already discussed in terms of prolepticity, a cultural memory function. Expunged and forgotten knowledges can be excavated from SF texts and re-contextualised in order to better understand the histories of a variety of cultural, intellectual, and social developments. The study of occult movements and cultural products possesses similar archaeological value, as the rejected heterotopian space of modern esotericism has been constructed from various discarded ideologies, symbols, and practices. A further characteristic of heterotopias — their achronicity[24] — helps to support this function. We have seen that both nineteenth-century SF and occultism reflected the period's interest in recovering and modernising ancient knowledges, in order to explore the possibility that experiences of the present — like mental communication and encounters with spirits — might be equivalent to those reported by the ancients *and* harbingers of human technologies to come. This interest in the overlap between ancient and modern (another binary), allowed both SF and occultism to

[22] Csicsery-Ronay, pp. 138–39.
[23] Foucault, 'Different Spaces', p. 180.
[24] See ibid. p. 182.

fulfil a heterotopian function as museums of discarded knowledge, storing and cataloguing experiences and knowledge claims from divers periods.

To return to the mediative function of heterotopia, however, both SF and occultism could also enable the transformation or adaptation of marginal or rejected concepts, sanitising them for transmission back to more dominant social groups or cultural discourses. In this sense they could serve two quite different purposes. First, they could perform a subverting or progressive function, challenging established epistemological or social structures. Here SF was most likely to act as mediator, transferring knowledge from marginal occult communities which might not otherwise have made it out of the esoteric context of these repositories of deviance. Novels by earnestly intentioned occultist authors like Britten and Sinnett were particularly operative here; both *Ghost Land* and *Karma* deploy practices and concepts which some occultists believed better kept secret, thus mediating between esoteric and exoteric. On the opposite end of the spectrum, however, both SF and occultism possess the capacity to neutralise and de-radicalise deviant knowledges, thus mediating knowledge between disconnected epistemic nodes by making it more palatable to both. This was particularly true of nineteenth-century occult science fiction. Bulwer's attempt to make demonology palatable by framing it within an empirically sustainable theory of telepathy had the effect, to a large degree, of exorcising its deviance, thus rendering black magic and sorcerous alchemy palatable to the enframed mind, within the epistemological context of the period at least. *Haunted* does the same for Spiritualist phenomena, incidentally reflecting later attempts by psychical researchers to bring apparently supernatural occurrences down to earth. Corelli's novels sanitise a range of Theosophical and Spiritualist concepts for consumption by less heterodox Christian readers, while also insisting on their empirical legitimacy for those more interested in the scientific aspects of the psychic creed. Whether storing, spreading, or sanitising occult knowledge, science fiction developed along the lines of the inherent contradiction encapsulated in the antinomy of its naming — the tension between 'science' and 'fiction'. Like occultism, and often in tandem with it, SF frequently mediated between post-Enlightenment binaries, proving useful for authors in search of epistemological harmonisation, and attracting readers with similar motivations.

Reanimation: the re-enchantment of self, species, and world

This heterotopian function can also be described in terms of another area of intersection between SF and occultism, the re-enchantment of perspectives felt to be made existentially sterile by the currents of enframing. Both SF and occultism have often been theorised in this way, presented as reactions to what Max Weber famously called the 'disenchantment of the world', literally a 'demagicking' (*Entzauberung*) perceived to have occurred in rationalist, industrialised

societies.[25] Science fiction could be produced from texts with a clear instinct for enchantment, a feeling of wonder that arises 'when our understanding of the world is challenged' without any proceeding explanation for what we have encountered, rather than disenchantment, which is perceived to destroy this feeling by organising and explaining the world in the manner of enframing.[26] Occultism, too, has until recently found itself joined at the hip with a variety of religious and aesthetic movements perceived to resist disenchantment.[27] Both movements are thus motivated, to a degree, by a neo-Romantic drive to enchant sterile materialist or industrialist perspectives through imagination and the generation of a sense of wonder. This is another vestigial characteristic which can be traced to the gothic heritage of both SF and occultism.[28]

As a significant body of scholarship over the last twenty years has shown, however, modern enchantment is rarely a simple matter of dreamy opposition to currents such as secularism and scientific materialism. As Hanegraaff argues, the contrast between enchantment and disenchantment is one of a number of dichotomous approaches to knowledge that rose in the wake of the Enlightenment. The epistemic success of modern science faced its devotees with a problem: given the clear value of rational thinking and its associated epistemologies and technologies for human cultural, economic, and social innovation, why did so many people — if not all people — continue to value non-rational ideas and non-empirical knowledge and experiences?[29] The idea of enchantment rose as a secular rationalist attempt to explain the continued, operative presence of the magical and superstitious within the post-Enlightenment episteme, as an intellectual attempt to fit continued desires for the unexplainable, the magical, and the sublime within a logical, empiricist structure. In other words, this form of modern enchantment, perhaps better referred to as re-enchantment, has developed as much *in service* of disenchantment as in reaction against it. The most visible face of enchantment since the Romantics has thus been antinomial, a re-enchantment that generates itself by opposing the very post-Enlightenment discourses that create space for its existence.[30]

This form of re-enchantment, negotiating between 'seemingly irreconcilable forces and ideas' with heterotopian fluidity, is ferried by a number of cultural forms, but fantastic literature,

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[25] Weber, p. 155. For the history of the disenchantment thesis see Saler, 'Modernity and Enchantment', pp. 695–99.

[26] Schneider, p. 3.

[27] See Saler, 'Modernity and Enchantment', pp. 697.

[28] On the Romantic heritage of SF, see Roberts, *Science Fiction*, p. 54; on the many entanglements between Romanticism and esotericism, see Hanegraaff, 'Romanticism'.

[29] Hanegraaff, 'Globalization of Esotericism', pp. 83–84.

[30] See Asprem, *Problem of Disenchantment*, esp. pp. 3–4; Saler, 'Modernity and Enchantment', pp. 694, 701–02; Saler, *As If*, p. 16; Stockhammer, p. 134.

film, and television have marked themselves as forms of enchantment able to make themselves 'compatible with, and even dependent on, those tenets of modernity usually seen as disenchanting the world.'[31] The same argument has been made convincingly for esoteric traditions like Spiritualism, Theosophy, and modern magic, which, along with a variety of other new religious movements of the last two centuries, have proven attractive to those seeking a sense of the sacred or spiritual, while yet unwilling to forgo the intellectual priorities set by the currents of enframing.[32] For Christopher Partridge, re-enchantment is made particularly accessible to the modern self via 'occulture', a 'reservoir' of occultist, New Age, and Eastern mystical concepts that have been 'de-exoticized' and made more accessible by popular culture,[33] and thus function as a common source of individual belief construction for the modern spiritual seeker.[34] Indeed, Partridge and a number of other scholars have argued that both occulture and the fantastic are uniquely suited for this 'significant sacralizing effect', and that they can thus frequently be found providing re-enchantment in tandem, via film, television, comic books, and fiction, particularly science fiction and fantasy.[35]

It is useful to consider re-enchantment as part of a larger set of existential responses to problems experienced by the subject in cultures defined by enframing, a re-magicking I have described elsewhere as 'reanimation'. This concept expands the scope of re-enchantment to assess the self's reaction to the currents of enframing not just on an epistemological level, but in a manner that takes account of the enframed subject's quest to re-establish a privileged place for both itself and the human race in a disenchanted universe. In the first, re-enchanting sense of the term, a reanimated perspective reintroduces the *anima*, or soul, into a world which the self perceives as disenchanted by reductionist and materialist structures. Reanimation can also be understood, however, as a socio-political necromancy, a waking from a feeling of inanimate powerlessness relative to the bureaucratic ordering of industrialised economies, or an elevation of a self-importance diminished by low social or intellectual status.[36] I would also like to discuss reanimation in early SF and occultism in a third sense not theorised in my earlier work — as a desire to re-assert the significance of the human race in general — to return to a sense of privileged identity reduced by nineteenth-century discoveries in biology, geology, and astronomy.

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[31] Saler, 'Modernity and Enchantment', pp. 700–02.
[32] Owen, *Place of Enchantment*, pp. 7, 11–12, 15–16, 255–57.
[33] Partridge, I, 4, 53, 69.
[34] Ibid. I, 84–85.
[35] Ibid. I, 5. Cf. I, 119, 124–26, 138–41; Saler, *As If*, p. 104; Kripal, *Authors of the Impossible*, p. 6.
[36] Roukema, pp. 226–32.

In the first, re-enchanting sense of reanimation, science fiction and occultism overlap in the manner in which they fuse religious concepts of soul, spirit, or astral body with scientific knowledge and discourse. Science fiction is particularly well-suited for the heterotopian mediation of re-enchantment because of the manner in which it deploys occult, spiritual, and supernatural concepts — thus re-magicking the world — while simultaneously obscuring any non-rational or non-empirical elements in these concepts with appeals to scientific discourse, natural law, and empirical method. Several theorists have identified SF as an important player in modern re-enchantment, though all see it as a twentieth-century phenomenon.[37] Partridge, for example, does not discuss occulture or fiction in the nineteenth century; indeed, while he identifies earlier fictions including *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) and *Dracula* (1897) as important examples of occult literature, he argues that such texts do not represent re-enchantment in that they 'tended to conclude with rational explanations for apparently supernatural events, thereby reinforcing a rationalist worldview […]. Nowadays, things have changed: the supernatural world is portrayed as fact'.[38]

As my earlier discussion of the shared occultist and science fictional interest in the naturalised supernatural has shown, however, both nineteenth-century SF and 'occulture' frequently portrayed the supernatural as fact via (largely discursive) attributions of natural law to events and realms previously consigned to the heavens or the imagination. Neither SF nor occultism fit with perspectives of re-enchantment that see it as a combination of reason and imagination that detours around the spiritual and supernatural, so that 'transcendence is preserved within a secular orientation'.[39] As Adam Possamai and Murray Lee argue of SF following the 1970s, science fiction facilitates 'multiple modernities', including the peaceful co-existence of science and religion.[40] SF was already performing this function in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, however, driven by the period's complex dialectic between religious and scientific currents. SF historians tend to project a secularising narrative into the period; Edward James, for example, typifies American SF as concerned with an 'aesthetic of the operational' rather than a concern for beauty or 'spiritual values'. The wonder of knowledge, not of religion, thus engendered the re-enchantment of early American SF, in James's view.[41] Indeed, if we restrict the history of SF, as has so often been done, to authors like Garrett P. Serviss, Verne, and Wells, who specifically sought to distance their fiction from magical, spiritual, or supernatural

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[37] Saler, *As If*, pp. 49, 86; Partridge, I, 126.

[38] Partridge, I, 126.

[39] Saler, 'Rethinking Secularism', np. Other examples of this approach include Levine, *Darwin Loves You*, pp. xv–xix, 137–38; Hanegraaff, 'How Magic Survived'. Saler describes SF as a 'distinct resource' for this secularised form of modern enchantment (*As If*, p. 86).

[40] Possamai and Lee, p. 214.

[41] James, 'Science Fiction by Gaslight', p. 39.

content, it is easy to view early SF in such specifically secularist terms. Yet, as Rita Felski illustrates in the course of setting up her analysis of the significance of women's supernatural fiction in the period, 'to equate modern consciousness with the atheistic or agonistic values of a minority of nineteenth-century intellectuals is to bypass the much more ambivalent attitudes of the majority […] for whom spirituality remained an urgently contemporary issue'.[42]

Unsurprisingly, given that it was this majority that drove book sales, the early SF mega-text frequently reflects this ambivalence; many texts are structured around a modern, re-enchanted perspective that rejects materialism and explores the magical and spiritual, but insists on doing so in a manner epistemically consistent with the currents felt to have disenchanted the world. We have seen that Fenwick's arc of character development allows precisely this opening from 'stern' materialism to a more open-ended perspective. A blend of scientific progress and occult spiritual yearning drives the discovery of space travel in Astor's *A Journey in Other Worlds*, where a professor looking back from the year 2000 on the history of scientific advancement explains that humanity must take on a broader perspective, enriched by religion, if it wishes to proceed further: 'Notwithstanding our strides in material progress, we are not entirely content. As the requirements of the animal become fully supplied, we feel […] the awakening and craving of our souls' (pp. 78–79). Eliff Zurioth Jovandeus, the Plutonian magician of Pope's *Journey to Mars*, attributes his scientised magic to power over 'nature and its laws' (p. 340). Eliff, however, is not content with this apparently disenchanted 'natural or occult science' (p. 339). He asks Lieutenant Hamilton, the novel's visitor from Earth, whether it has occurred to him that 'the laws of Nature are but the manifest workings of Spiritual Beings?' Hamilton replies that not only is this a favourable hypothesis 'with many highly cultivated minds in our world', it is also a 'reaction against gross materialism […] not denied by many scientific men'. Indeed, Eliff opines, Earth, like Mars in ages past, is currently disadvantaged by this disenchanted perspective. However, 'the time will come,' he predicts, 'when gross materialism will be swept away, and your world will be awakened to the true philosophy of the close relations existing between the material and spiritual world' (p. 354).

These fictional representations of re-enchantment reflect occultist efforts to reanimate inanimate materialist perspectives. Alex Owen has shown that a re-enchanting dialectic was an essential part of late-century efforts to make esoteric practices like ritual magic and astral travel compatible with rationalistic worldviews.[43] Gauri Viswanathan has evaluated the epistemology of the Theosophical Society in similar terms, arguing that the Society's approach to legitimation and dissemination of knowledge created a system of institutional authority that made its enchanted

[42] Felski, p. 132.
[43] Owen, *Place of Enchantment*, esp. pp. 11–12, 255–57.

knowledge palatable within disenchanted systems. By institutionalising occult knowledge via the Society's organisational structure, global publication initiatives, and sponsorship of large conferences designed to publicise esoteric knowledge, the Theosophical Society 'went a long way in routinizing occultism as professional knowledge', thus dispersing 'nonrational, nonempiricist modes of cognition into branches of official study'.[44]

As Hanegraaff has shown, however, such re-enchantment could also occur without actually attributing non-empirical forces or non-rational causality to the material world. Hanegraaff argues that occultists from the mid-nineteenth century forward began to achieve an enchanted rapprochement with disenchantment by retreating from claims to achieve exterior magical effects. Occultism, in this view, became an interior, psychological pursuit, aimed at the elevation of consciousness and the spiritual or psychological advancement of the self. Thus, an enchanted magical function was maintained via an inner imaginal perspective, while disenchantment ruled unchallenged without.[45] As Partridge and Asprem observe, this binary approach was far from ubiquitous among occultists. They did indeed prioritise the imaginal powers of the mind, but most still perceived themselves to be interacting with real astral or spiritual realms exterior to the self.[46] This shift to an interior perspective in search of re-enchantment does, however, indicate a coming together of magical praxis and the creation and consumption of literature, particularly fantastic forms like science fiction. Both fiction and magic stimulated the imagination in order to enter other worlds or enhance the potential for occult experience in our own. Occult-infused science fiction such as that which I have explored in this dissertation thus possessed the potential to re-enchant in a manner similar, for some, to the actual practice of magic itself.

Science fiction and occultism also joined a variety of other social, intellectual, and cultural forums in providing opportunity for a second form of reanimation — a space in which the modern subject could successfully grapple with a perceived reduction in power and significance experienced in an enframed society in which technology, mechanisation, and ever-growing economic complexity could appear to subsume the self. This perception was by no means universal; as indicated by the positivist excitement of SF stories like Astor's *Journey in Other Worlds* or Serviss's *A Columbus of Space* (1909), many saw technological and economic advancement as the key to further human progress. A less confident and just as pervasive view, however, is reflected by Heidegger's fear in 'The Question Concerning Technology' that the rational ordering, industrialisation, and rapid technological change of modernity had left humanity in its wake, without control over the currents it had set in motion. This can be seen as a

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[44] Viswanathan, 6–7.
[45] Hanegraaff, 'How Magic Survived', pp. 361–66.
[46] See Partridge, I, 41; Asprem, *Arguing with Angels*, p. 74.

more encompassing, systemic description of the condition of the capitalist subject with which Marx was concerned in the previous century — deprived of the means of production, the labourer was also disconnected from the objects with which they worked and from the value extracted from their labour. In this view, the proletarian subject's feelings of connectivity, social value, and fulfilment were diminished in capitalist systems.[47] The struggle for significance among the non-elite was hardly new, but the positions of Marx and Heidegger, along with the coinciding struggle by existentialist philosophers from Kierkegaard to Sartre to establish new sources of meaning, indicate a new sort of helplessness and diminishment experienced by the modern subject in the wake of rapid technological and epistemological change. As Luckhurst has argued, anxieties provoked by this encounter with mechanistic change created fertile soil for the emergence of science fiction.[48] Most importantly for our current purposes, science fiction also offered succour to the modern subject by turning to the naturalised and scientifically discursive reanimation of occultism.

As I have described in a previous discussion of the relationship between esotericism and fiction, the magical thinking and causality of occultism seem to prove attractive to the modern subject because they offer both a reconstituted perspective of the self's place in the world, and, for some, an actual elevation of power that combats feelings of powerlessness within the series of technological, epistemic, and economic systems that threaten to override the agency of the individual.[49] Anthropological research done in the US and UK in the 1980s and 90s discovered a correlation between personal histories of abuse and trauma and involvement with magic-oriented movements like Paganism and Wicca. The will to magic is thus, in part, a will to power. Despite the apparent irrationality of magical theory, it appeals to disempowered subjects as 'a belief that one is capable of causing change (that one is powerful) and that the change will occur according to one's Will (that one is in control).'[50] These conclusions are not fully transferable to a nineteenth-century cultural and epistemological context, but power over nature and fellow humans has long been a part of what magic has to offer. For Eliphas Lévi, the 'glory' of the 'absolute science' of magic was its augmentation of the abilities and position of the self: 'The adept becomes king of the elements, transmuter of metals, interpreter of visions, controller of oracles, master of life in fine, according to the mathematical order of Nature and conformably to the will of the Supreme Intelligence.'[51] Whether considered real or imaginal (and often it is

[47] Marx, pp. 187–96.
[48] Luckhurst, *Science Fiction*, pp. 3–5, 25–29.
[49] Roukema, pp. 229–31.
[50] Reid, pp. 150. Cf. pp. 147–49, 161; Greenwood, pp. 149–50.
[51] Lévi, p. 3.

considered to be both), occultism offers the modern subject a reanimated perspective of its place in the world, as well as control over that world and its systems.

Science fiction frequently makes the same offer. The most impactful recent example may be *The Matrix* (1999), in which select techno-adepts are given the opportunity to reanimate their perspectives by taking a pill that allows them to see past the illusion of the digitally created world in which they falsely believe themselves to exist. Having achieved this gnosis, their bodies literally reanimate, rising from glass coffins in which they have been held in stasis in order to provide a race of machines with vital energy. Awakened to the misery of his true reality, Neo, the film's hero, is able to re-enter the imaginal world of the Matrix in much the same form as before, but this time with a quasi-magical ability to manipulate it. This restoration of control over the systems and technologies that might otherwise enslave or diminish is also a key theme in early SF, where the individual subject is freed from the restrictions of social position, economic disparity, and even materialist biology.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given her clearly visible feeling that she was constantly subject to diminishment and disrespect by the publishing world and other intellectual elites,[52] Corelli's novels thrive on this intersection between occult power and the technological apotheosis of science fiction. Heliobas's mesmeric healing of the Electric Woman reanimates her physically, but it also elevates her cosmic status. In the midst of her astral journey, the Electric Woman becomes aware of herself as eternal, 'formed of an indestructible essence' by virtue of her emanation from the divine electric sphere. Because of this 'superior force in myself', she feels certain that were all the 'stars and system suddenly to end in one fell burst of brilliant horror, I should still exist […] should be able to watch the birth of a new Universe and take my part in its growth and design' (p. 175). Both aspects of reanimation discussed thus far are on display here. Corelli's hero experiences cosmic wonder at the same time as she becomes aware of her capacity to order the universe, rather than *be ordered* by its intractable processes. By the time of *Life Everlasting*, the Electric Woman has, through occult training and exposure to esoteric wisdom, become a 'psychist' of significant power and influence. She is known as someone who stands 'apart from the world though in the world' as a result of her knowledge of 'psychic science' (p. 60). Once she has learned to 'control the atomic forces' within herself, as another adept instructs her, 'You will equally govern and control all atomic forces which come within your atmosphere' (p. 349). Morgana achieves a similar apotheosis in *The Secret Power*, discovering that she is a member of a hyper-evolved 'new race' of humanity that, through an occult scientific method which combines clairvoyance with material technological innovation, has developed the ability to communicate by

[52] See Kuehn, 'Eulogiseth Marie', pp. 570–73.

'sound ray' (an empirical explanation for spirit communication). This advanced race has also discovered a 'Light Ray' not yet known to conventional science, which they use to beam projections of themselves to remote locations (pp. 218–19), a technology that would become a mainstay in science fictional communication devices such as the holographic transmissions of *Star Wars*.

The reanimation of the individual in SF and occultism was very often framed in terms of powers that might be achieved by the rapid, ongoing evolution of humankind. This contributed to the development of one of SF's most influential tropes: the naturalised superhuman. In the form of gods and other supernatural entities, humans have long shown interest in what is beyond, or superior to themselves. In the nineteenth century, however, in a conflux of evolutionary theory, scientific naturalism, and a range of radical hypotheses about the potential abilities of the mind and body, a specifically *natural* future human began to dominate superhuman thinking, a development which prepared the ground for the superhero of twentieth-century comic books. Long before Spiderman or the Flash, however, superhumans populated late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century fiction, particularly of the utopian or science fictional variety. A group of secret scientist adepts are preparing for 'progressive series of evolutions' of 'the faculties of men' in John Uri Lloyd's *Etidorhpa; or, the End of the Earth. The Strange History of a Mysterious Being and the Account of a Remarkable Journey* (1895, p. 66). This leap has already occurred for a race of telepathic humans discovered on a remote island in Edward Bellamy's 'To Whom This May Come' (1880). Barty Josselin, the hero of George du Maurier's *The Martian* (1897), develops a capacity for spirit communication as a result of the evolutionary mutation of a new gland in his brain, a trait he is destined to pass on to his descendants, thus inaugurating a new species of humanity.

The concept of the superhuman exhibits an optimism regarding human evolution that, similar to the awe and wonder of late-century romances, has been overlooked in favour of a focus on anxieties concerning degradation and devolution.[53] This optimism could be found among professional scientists like neurologist George Beard and psychologist Richard Bucke, and even in the works of Darwin himself,[54] but occultists were particularly interested in the possibility of scientifically legitimating either a coming race of psychically gifted humans,[55] or a small sample of people, gifted with psychic mutations, who could already read minds, send thoughts, and communicate with spirits. Theosophists and Spiritualists even extended the range of human

[53] But see Oppenheim, p. 268; Luckhurst, *Invention of Telepathy*, p. 110; Ferguson, 'Reading with the Occultists', pp. 2–3.

[54] Beard, 'Physical Future of the American People'; Bucke, *Cosmic Consciousness*, p. 309; Darwin, II, 405.

[55] See Hammer, pp. 254–59.

evolution into the afterlife and onto other planets,[56] providing, as I will discuss shortly, fertile ground for the development of later concepts of extra-planetary human civilisations and the extra-terrestrial. Science fiction was thus heavily dependent on occult concepts in its thinking about the future human, but it also contributed to occultism in providing a forum for the de-exoticisation of its ideas, repackaging them for mass popular consumption in order to extract their reanimating potential.

The superhuman is also implicated in a third aspect of reanimation: a concern with re-establishing the pre-eminence of humanity in a cosmos made much vaster by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century scientific discoveries. Astronomers and geologists established immense scales of time and space in which humanity had only recently arrived on an insignificant planet in a dusty corner of one galaxy among billions. Evolutionary biology was perhaps most impactful in this diminishment of the human, as Darwin and others revealed that humans were not so exceptionally different from other creatures and had, in fact, very likely evolved from common ancestors. Evolutionary theory seemed, as George Levine notes, 'to have removed both meaning and consolation from the world'.[57]

As SF critics have frequently observed, these species-defining and world-shaping discoveries had an enormous influence on the development of science fiction. Brian Aldiss goes so far as to define the genre as a post-gothic 'search for a definition of mankind and his status in the universe which will stand in our advanced but confused state' of scientific knowledge.[58] Patrick B. Sharp argues that Darwin's ideas in particular have provided a 'master narrative' for SF authors 'since the inception of the genre', to the degree that 'science fiction is inherently Darwinist' (484).[59] Darwinian evolution was certainly influential, particularly on the work of Wells, a student of Huxley, who was often known as 'Darwin's bulldog', but it is more accurate to describe the genre as 'evolutionist'. Partly as a result of SF's various collisions with occult thought, the influence of rival schools of evolutionary theory is easily unearthed within the mega-text. One of these, as discussed below, is Theosophy's vast, cyclical theory of evolutionary history; teleological evolutionary theories which assumed the continuing evolutionary improvement of humanity, like those of Robert Chambers, A.R. Wallace, and, later, Frederic Myers,[60] should also be seen as important source materials for SF and occultism, both frequently fascinated with the future of human genetics and psychical development. Going further back, Jean-Baptiste Lamarck's late-eighteenth-century proposition that characteristics shaped by the experiences or environment of

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[56] Ferguson, 'Eugenics and the Afterlife', pp. 68–70, 81.
[57] Levine, *Darwin Loves You*, p. 1.
[58] Aldiss and Wingrove, p. 25.
[59] Sharp, pp. 475, 484.
[60] See Hesketh, pp. 197–201, 216.

a particular organism could be inherited by its offspring also continued to exert cultural and intellectual influence. Anna Neill has argued persuasively that this privileging of Lamarckism particularly dominated nineteenth-century mental science, wherein mental evolution was theorised as the result of both natural selection and specific permutations in which the mind became 'strengthened and enlarged, so as to make the most of its environment.'[61] In this confluence of occult and scientific theory the superhuman was imagined in terms of a coming psychical sublimation of the entire race. It is in this sense that Gurney, Podmore, and Myers saw telepathy as a 'first glimpse of a process of psychical evolution, as true and actual as any in the physical world.'[62]

This coming superhumanity could prompt evolutionary anxiety, as it does in Bulwer's *Coming Race*, and indeed Lamarck's ideas also helped perpetuate fears of ongoing human degeneration, but generally occultism and SF were optimistic about this superhuman future. Just as P.B. Randolph was convinced that 'scores of people' would soon 'develop the ability' for telepathy,[63] Corelli casts reanimated characters like Heliobas and the Electric Woman as harbingers of a '"generation" which must most surely and rapidly "pass away" to make room for another, and as the work of the Universe is always progressive, that other will be of nobler capacity and larger accomplishment' (*ROTW*, pp. 323–24). Godfrey Sweven's utopia, *Limanora: The Island of Progress* (1903) presents a society attempting to improve itself through an engineered evolution that, while suggestive of contemporary eugenics, actually seems more guided by occult speculation surrounding mental evolution. The Limanorans have invented a 'time-telescope' through which they can view the nature of their future selves and design their own evolution accordingly (p. 231). This teleology channels esoteric concepts of evolution toward spiritual and physical perfection via a series of lifetimes, usually spent on other planets.[64] It also reflects the occult idea, expressed, for example, by Lawrence Oliphant in *Scientific Religion* (1888),[65] that human evolution is guided by higher beings or masters — the higher beings in this case being the future Limanorans themselves who are, of course, well aware of the gaze of the time-telescope upon them (pp. 219–20). The thoroughly magical end goal of this process of self-guided evolution is the ability to act directly on objects and beings through mental force. Beyond this, the Limanorans seek to evolve into ethereal beings that will, like the spirits and astral bodies of occultism, one day leave Earth and inhabit other regions of space. As often as authors like Wells envisioned a human race devolved to a quasi-bestial state, other SF authors resisted such fatalism and

[61] Neill, p. 17.
[62] Gurney and others, II, 318.
[63] Randolph, *Dealings with the Dead*, pp. 8–9.
[64] See below, pp. 216–18.
[65] See esp. pp. 219–20.

envisioned a brighter future, often looking to the evolutionary optimism of occultism and psychical research to do so. This optimistic view of the future of the species is thus a third area in which SF and occultism have joined to offer reanimation to the disempowered, disenchanted modern subject.

Serious play

As already discussed with reference to the authorship strategies of writers like Corelli and Britten, the verisimilitude of early SF could be upheld via a permeability between the text and the personal experiences or beliefs of the author. This amounted to a reciprocal relationship between seriously held belief and ludic creativity — another point of intersection for occultism and SF. As Mikhail Bakhtin observes, 'the boundaries between fiction and nonfiction, between literature and non literature […] are not laid up in heaven'. Fiction is 'constructed in a zone of contact with the incomplete events of a particular present', and is thus ever subject to the non-fictional peculiarities of its own period.[66] Science fiction texts, consciously emulating non-fictional discourses in order to dialogue with them, often provide clear examples of the rootedness of fiction in real-world knowledge, debate, and experience, despite their own clear impossibilities. This characteristic was particularly important in a period where literature and scientific reportage still had a degree of overlap. We have seen that occultists treated the 'zone of contact' between reality and fiction with an even greater degree of permeability: Britten's *Ghost Land* is a fictional companion to the 'spiritual science' communicated in *Art Magic*; Sinnett's *Karma* explores and defends his experiences with Blavatsky and other mediums and adepts. This boundary, cannily exploited by Corelli, allowed for a reciprocal exchange in which the personal experiences of the author could be used to establish science fictional verisimilitude while, conversely, fiction could emboss both the reality and the epistemological value of these experiences and the knowledge derived from them.

This relationship between fiction and knowledge both scientific and religious had at least two other important ramifications for the relationship between SF and occultism, however. First, occultists were drawn to an already centuries-old tradition of using fiction to communicate ideas in a manner that routed around whichever censors determined the knowledge of Bakhtin's 'particular present'. For earlier SF authors these were religious dominants hostile to scientific discoveries like Copernican astronomy because of their theological implications,[67] but for nineteenth-century authors science itself was emerging as a purveyor of dominant discourses.

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[66] Bakhtin, p. 33.
[67] See, e.g., Roberts, 'Copernican Revolution', pp. 7–8, 10.

Science fiction has often upheld the claims of technoscience, but because it pretends to represent empiricist reality structures rather than actually restricting itself to them, SF also offers an opportunity for those like occultists and psychical researchers who advocate marginal scientific ideas.[68] In the examples of Bulwer and Britten we have seen that early science fiction could provide a forum through which rejected or marginalised ideas could be explored and communicated, thereby bypassing the censors of publications reluctant to publish ideas seen as incompatible with established natural law, or, in Bulwer's case, enabling a personal reluctance to clearly and contentiously ally with rejected currents. As Sinnett said of Bulwer, in wondering why Lord Lytton did not more clearly share his occult knowledge with the world, 'It is not impossible […] that he preferred to throw out his information in a veiled and mystic shape, so that it would be intelligible to readers in sympathy with himself, and would blow unnoticed past the commonplace understanding without awakening […] angry rejection'.[69]

We have seen, however, that while Bulwer was reluctant to fully and publicly embrace occult ideas, he also used fiction to openly join in scientific debate and propose a variety of his own theories, including a telepathic explanation for paranormal and occult experience. In this sense he represents a second, more common area of overlap between earnest belief, established fact, and narrative — the use of fiction to communicate rival scientific theories ranging from the ridiculously playful to the sublimely serious. Samuel R. Delany argues that science fiction's 'distortions of accepted scientific knowledge' following the Golden Age are notably typified by a '*theoretical plurality.* […] Whatever modern science might declare theoretically impossible was invariably challenged by a fictive theoretical revision.' For Delany, this challenge to the epistemic dominance of science could include the rationalised occult: 'Magic is theoretically impossible? Very well, we will have SF stories exploring worlds where magic works.'[70] The only problem with this view of SF's potential for ludic challenge to real-world currents of enframing is Delany's belief that it is a post-Golden Age phenomenon. Nineteenth-century science fiction also offered this possibility to authors, and was frequently generated by it.

For Nathaniel Hawthorne's son Julian, this atmosphere of 'theoretical plurality' offered space for authors of fiction to contribute to the progress of psychical research. Hawthorne was unable to follow in his father's footsteps as a successful novelist, though he did explore his interest in psychical phenomena in novels like *The Professor's Sister: A Romance* (1888). Hawthorne's 'Psychology in Literature', an 1897 essay published in the first issue of *Mind*, argued for a conflation of literary and scientific method. He scolded psychical researchers and scientists for

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[68] Delany, *Starboard Wine*, pp. 220–22.
[69] Sinnett, 'Occultism in Fiction', p. 20.
[70] Delany, *Starboard Wine*, p. 221.

failing to provide proof of psychical phenomena because they insisted on empirical methods that were too material for the immaterial phenomena at play. Public attention to psychical investigation, he argued, had flagged because these researchers lacked imagination and innovation. Fiction, he believed, provided a laboratory for innovation and thought-experimentation that bypassed these limitations. Fiction writers, not scientists, had 'popularized the results of psychologic investigation' thus far. Though some of these popularisations had 'degraded psychology', writers with earnest intentions to promote psychical research and disseminate its findings stood as advocates for 'a wider more synthetic outlook' on psychical research: 'Marie Corelli, Mr. A.P. Sinnett, and perhaps a few more, have […] done their work in a higher spirit.'[71]

Hawthorne's belief that fiction writers could do a better job stimulating new research into the uncharted territories of the mind, while simultaneously communicating findings to an otherwise ill-informed public, connects to a longstanding educational instinct in science fiction writing. In the wake of the nineteenth-century emergence of a 'popular science' distinct from the professional and internalised spheres of actual scientific debate, SF emerged partly as a forum for scientific literacy. Already in 1851, Sydney Whiting identified his motivation for writing *Heliondé* in educational terms, noting that, with the help of physicist and inventor Sir David Brewster, he had endeavoured to project the 'real and substantial' into his imagined Solar civilisation, with the hope that for the reader 'the love of the marvellous may become tempered with the necessity of learning home truths'.[72] Jules Verne also saw his fiction as educational,[73] an ethic which Hugo Gernsback would eventually define as a core aspect of science fiction.[74] At the conflux of science fiction authorship and esoteric belief and experience, this educational ethic has shown itself able to take a proselytic turn. Authors from Britten to C.S. Lewis to L. Ron Hubbard have exploited the productive liminal spaces between the imaginal and empirical for religious purposes, affecting the methods and discourses of science in order to substantiate the spiritual, supernatural, miraculous, and paranormal. This space — the natural home, perhaps, of science fiction — has frequently attracted earnest, serious advocates of religious systems, particularly those who insist on rationality and naturalism.

Likely because of the prevalence of efforts to resolve tensions between science and religion in the period, early SF features a number of similar attempts to proselytise via a fiction-based scientific legitimacy. The purposes of Sinnett's *Karma* align with those of his fictional Baron.

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[71] Hawthorne, p. 3.
[72] Whiting, pp. xv–xvi.
[73] Evans, 'The Beginnings', p. 36.
[74] Gernsback, 'A New Sort of Magazine'.

Following the successful conclusion of the Baron's plan to prove phenomena including the astral realm, clairvoyance, and reincarnation, 'books are to be written […] and some society formed for the propagation of the ideas the Baron has been communicating' (pp. 256–57). *Karma* represents a spoke in the wheel of Sinnett's mission to grow the Theosophical Society and defend Blavatsky's occult powers — as well as his own experiences detailed in *The Occult World* — from the criticism provoked by the Hodgson report. The novel is thus infused with verisimilitude not only by its dialogue with empirical method, but also by the earnestness of Sinnett's convictions. From the perspective of *Karma*'s author, the incredible abilities displayed by Lakesby and the Baron are intended more for education and conviction than for enchantment and entertainment.

A further mega-textual example of proselytic science fiction is occultist W.J. Colville's *Dashed Against the Rock: A Romance of the Coming Age* (1894). Colville impressed his experiences with Theosophy, New Thought, and Spiritualist mediumship into the novel, for the purposes, he said in the introduction, of 'public edification' (p. 5). He had written *Dashed Against the Rock* to call attention to the 'astounding revelation' posed by the 'scientific dissertations and tables which form a considerable portion of the volume' (p. 3). Similar to the editorial role paratextually established by Britten, Colville claimed to have received this indisputable evidence from a source which he could not reveal. His mission was thus to reveal these 'altogether natural, even though spiritual — statements concerning exact science' (p. 3), a mission which would be fulfilled 'if any one […] receives light from its pages' (p. 5). For Colville, fiction was not just a convenient forum in which to express his ideas and share indisputable scientific evidence regarding occult forces and experiences. Its educational value was realised by its much greater potential for popularity: 'A few special students read professedly scientific and philosophical works, but everybody reads "light literature"' (p. 7).

Indeed, Colville believed that the romance form actually had a capacity to communicate knowledge that could not be realised by other forms of written communication and expression. 'The deepest philosophy and most glorious science must be introduced in the guise of fiction if it is to be considered extensively', he claimed (p. 7). These arguments for the revelatory potential of fiction constitute a paratextual device intended to enhance the novel's verisimilitude, even if only for the purposes of ludic pleasure. Yet, it is likely that Colville did actually see the romance as a forum for elevated thinking and expression; indeed, this view was popular among occultist writers of fiction. Andrew Brown observes that Bulwer applied words he wrote early in his career regarding Lady Blessington's novels to the whole of his writing life. 'A delineation of man's spiritual life', said Bulwer at this early point, is 'the appointed destiny of the Romance of the

Nineteenth Century.'[75] It is in this frame that Bulwer saw *Strange Story* as 'a great vindication of Soul […] that solves many riddles'.[76] Crucially, it must have some 'some interest for the general reader' to achieve such purposes, he said in the preface of the bound novel released in 1862, avoiding the dullness of 'a treatise submitted to the logic of sages.' Quoting Thomas Gray, he anticipated Colville in his Romantic belief that 'it is only when "in fairy fiction drest" that Romance gives admission to "truths severe"' (*SS*, I, vi).

In an 1893 letter to George Bentley, Corelli described her authorial strategy as an attempt to use romance to direct readers toward the divine.[77] Corelli, however, cannot be seen in the same light as sincere occultists like Britten, Sinnett, and Colville. The evidence suggests that both her religious beliefs and her fervent advocacy for the power of fiction were more ambiguous than her 1893 letter suggests. An earlier letter to Bentley indicates that Corelli did not initially intend to link the electric creed of *Two Worlds* to personal experience: 'Do you think it might be necessary', she asked in 1885, 'To have a short preface explanatory of the fact that this is not an actual theory of religious belief?'[78] Corelli did end up writing this preface, but we have seen that rather than disclaim religious authenticity it connects the creed to the author's personal experience. A picture thus emerges of Corelli's dawning realisation that presenting the novel as 'an actual theory of religious belief' could amount to a canny marketing strategy, particularly if that system appealed to late Victorian readers interested in harmonising religious concepts with scientific naturalism and empiricism. As Corelli wrote to Bentley three years later: 'People appear to revel in and gloat over anything that has to do with an admixture of science and religion'.[79]

Given Corelli's canny ability to productively blend reality with fiction — personal experience with development of character and concept — it is difficult to determine the extent to which she ever actually believed in the tenets of the creed she so energetically advocated. Like Britten, she stubbornly defended them, despite the suggestion of conscious fictionalisation in her letters to Bentley. In a letter to Oliver Lodge in 1907, two decades after *Two Worlds*, Corelli continued to insist that Heliobas was a fictionalised version of a 'brilliant friend and tutor' who was aware of radium over a decade before Marie Curie's discovery, 'and actually possessed it in a small tube'.[80] Perhaps Corelli had grown so accustomed to a permeability between life and fiction that she no

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[75] Brown, 'Bulwer's Reputation', p. 30. Brown quotes from 'Lady Blessington's Novels', *Edinburgh Review*, 67 (1838), 357.

[76] Edward Bulwer-Lytton to W. Kent, 27 September 1861, Boston Public Library, MS c.1.41.41, qtd. In Mitchell, p. 136. On the serious intent of Bulwer's romances, see Mitchell, p. 142.

[77] Marie Corelli to George Bentley, 23 November 1893, qtd. in McCann, p. 93. Cf. Kuehn, *Glorious Vulgarity*, pp. 23–24, 27.

[78] Qtd. in Masters, p. 55.

[79] Marie Corelli to George Bentley, 5 March 1888, qtd. in Stiles, *Popular Fiction and Brain Science*, p. 166.

[80] Marie Corelli to Oliver Lodge, 1907, in Jolly, p. 165.

longer bothered to adjust her authorial strategies for context. Another possibility is that she had become convinced by her own fictions, to the point where she believed that she had innovated a new religion *and* anticipated the discoveries of leading scientists. Whatever the case, she held fast to this inextricable relationship between experience, belief, and fiction until the end. In the week before her death, Corelli wrote to J. Cuming Walters, who seems to have asked for clarity on her personal beliefs. With her letter she sent a copy of *Life Everlasting*: 'If you will read the 'prologue' only, you will grasp my faith.'[81] As we have seen, this prologue ties together Corelli the person and Corelli the author with the narratorial voice of the Electric Woman. As if to justify this inextricable relationship, the prologue also argues for fiction as a more efficient vehicle for communicating knowledge, doubting that readers will listen to 'any spiritual truth' delivered in 'the form of separate essays on the nature of […] mystic tuition and experience' (p. 31).

Corelli thus occupies the middle ground between the serious play of occultist authors and the instinct to entertain and enchant which guided most instances of occult-infused science fictional writing in the nineteenth century. Her claims to have based her psychic creed, and the supernormal events it makes possible, on her own life and beliefs seems ultimately intended to re-enforce the veracity of her romances — her 1885 letter to Bentley indicates that this was her initial motivation at the very least. Yet, there also appears to have been a growing sincerity behind her presentation of the psychic creed, a heterodox Christian occultism wherein both the tenets of her belief and her memories of personal experience may have been generated by her own fiction.

Science fiction and the mass production of occultism

As a result of such serious play, early SF played a significant role in the development of occultism, in addition to benefitting from the narrative potential of esoteric materials. SF acted as a medium through which seriously intentioned authors could transmit esoteric knowledge and were recognised by fellow occultists as doing so. It could also, however, provoke new currents of scientised religion, or contribute to occulture through the unwitting conveyance of esoteric ideas by authors purely interested in their narrative value. Blavatsky's incorporation of fiction as a source for esoteric wisdom is a well-known example that brings together all these strands. The Theosophical Society founder approvingly recommended several popular novels as sources of occult knowledge, including *A Romance of Two Worlds*, Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and*

[81] Marie Corelli to J. Cuming Walters, 6 December 1923, Marie Corelli Papers (Collection 748), Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA, qtd. in Stiles, *Popular Fiction and Brain Science*, p. 163.

Mr Hyde (1886), and Haggard's *She* and *King Solomon's Mines*. Most of all, however, she found inspiration in the works of Bulwer-Lytton, particularly *Zanoni* and *The Coming Race*.[82]

SF thus played a role in the de-exoticisation of the occult revival, providing a forum in which esoteric concepts were transformed into an exoteric, easily accessible aspect of modern popular culture. Movements like Spiritualism and Theosophy believed that the time had come for this revelation of the secret ancient wisdom of occultism; with it, humanity could accelerate both its spiritual development and species advancement. Yet, their audiences were never so large as the readership of a single novel published by Bulwer or Corelli. As a contemporary critic observed, Corelli's venture 'with more daring than knowledge [into] esoteric mysteries' could also spread and de-mystify the occult. In fact, such de-exoticisation could not occur without such a ludic forum: 'The great reading public knows little of these matters, because, as a rule, they have been expressed by writers whose works are too abstruse to catch the popular ear. It is only when they are handled by writers of imaginative fiction that they become popularly known at all.'[83] As a result of reflecting, absorbing, and transforming esoteric knowledge, cultural forms like science fiction both communicated this knowledge to the existing public and preserved it for future audiences. Popular fiction thus became an important occultural vehicle. Science fiction, in other words, did not just engage with occultism in these important decades of its development — it sometimes *became* occultism.

As Partridge observes, such creations of occulture need not be intentional. 'Consumers of occulture may be witting or unwitting; they may engage with it at a relatively superficial level or they may have strong religious commitments; they may themselves contribute to the pool of occultural knowledge or they may simply drink from it.'[84] Though Partridge theorises occulture as a post-1960s phenomenon, this description of the role of popular cultural forms like science fiction in revealing esoteric knowledge and creating new occult forms is just as apt for the period with which I am concerned. Much of the occult-tinged SF of this era seems either to have borrowed its esoteric elements from previous works of fiction, or to have incorporated occult scientific concepts from non-fictional sources purely for ludic purposes. While I consider the serious play of occultist writers to be a chronically under-appreciated aspect of the history of science fiction, it was certainly not the dominant mode of science fictional writing in the period. Most early SF authors who incorporated esoteric concepts were simply playing, drawing on occultism's scientific discursivity, prolepticity, naturalised supernatural, and appeal to experiential empiricism in order to create verisimilitude while maintaining the enchanting displacements of

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[82] See Gilhus and Mikaelsson, p. 454.
[83] Murray, p. 148.
[84] Partridge, I, 85.

the fantastic. Yet, though such authors may not have been seriously interested in occultism, their work transported the occultural significance of their source materials. As Kennet Granholm has argued with relation to the esoteric appropriations of black metal, such cultural absorption and transformation does not necessarily entail a relinquishing of occult lineage.[85] In ANT terms, occult SF texts thus constitute nodes in both the network of the SF mega-text, *and* the network of occultism following the mid-nineteenth century.

The complexity of the networks that could arise from the engagement between SF and occultism is illustrated by the nature and reception of novels by widely read authors like Bulwer and Corelli. As discussed in Chapter Two, Bulwer's SF, particularly *The Coming Race,* had distinct mega-textual influence and even prompted early antecedents to SF convention and cosplay culture. Bulwer's SF has had even more lasting effects in occultism, however. The concept of vril has exerted a particularly durable attraction; from Blavatsky to particular secret societies in Germany prior to World War II,[86] occultists have searched for vril or comparable forces in hopes of acquiring superhuman power or explanations for a wide gamut of phenomena, including mental communication. In expanding on Blavatsky's conception of a race of Atlanteans that preceded humanity, Theosophist William Scott-Elliot imagined Atlantean aircraft powered by vril in *The Story of Atlantis* (1896). William Walker Atkinson, a prominent proponent of New Thought, offered twelve 'lessons' on vril power, its nature, and its application in *Vril; or Vital Magnetism* (1911). It is no surprise that an occult thinker like Atkinson, who preached a doctrine of 'mind-power' that made mind-reading, telepathy, and psychomancy possible by 'pervading all space',[87] would be attracted to vril, a force used for precisely these purposes by the Vril-ya of Bulwer's novel. These adaptations of vril are just a few examples of how Bulwer's occult science fiction has been used to enhance and innovate concepts in a variety of alternative religious contexts up to the present day.[88] This flow of influence from fictional element to occult concept, practice, and symbol formation, has dramatic repercussions for our understanding of the relationship between science fiction and esotericism in the last 170 years.

Corelli's novels provoked similar occultural transformations of knowledge. I have already described her impact on modern American Rosicrucianism; her work also echoed through other channels in the occult network. Colville, himself an important disseminator of occultist ideas from

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[85] Granholm, 'Ritual Black Metal', p. 8.

[86] On the general occult impact of the vril concept, see Strube, *Vril*. For the context of Blavatsky's interest in Vril, see *Secret Doctrine*, I, 605. While Blavatsky admitted that vril itself 'may be a fiction; the Force itself is a fact' (I, 614). On the interest of German occultists in vril see Goodrick-Clarke, *Occult Roots of Nazism*, pp. 218–19. Cf. Seed, 'Introduction', pp. xlii–xliv.

[87] Atkinson, *Mind-Power*, p. 7.

[88] The search for vril continues, for example, in Alec Maclellan's *The Lost World of Agharti: The Mystery of Vril Power* (London: Souvenir Press, 1982).

the nineteenth century to later generations, saw Corelli as a vital link in the development of the concept of the individual magnetic 'aura' perceived to envelop each person. Colville's chain of influence began with mesmerist and Odyle advocate William Gregory, but the fiction of Bulwer and Corelli constituted two further links.[89] A further example is illustrated by Gerald B. Bryan, an early member of the 'I AM' movement, founded in America by Guy and Edna Ballard. Bryan became dissatisfied with the group and wrote a critical account of its origins, wherein he links I AM's development in the 1930s to 'research work' carried out by the Ballards — particularly Edna, who worked at a Spiritualist bookstore — by reading occult fiction. Bryan highlights the role of *The Secret Power* in this process, pointing out the similarities between Corelli's novel and key Ballard doctrines, including the 'Golden Etheric City' to which Guy claimed to withdraw as an ascended master, and the organisation's 'Light and Sound Ray', on which I AM based a techno-clairvoyance similar to that achieved by Morgana and other members of the novel's superhuman race.[90]

Long after her death, Corelli continued to exert a similar influence in Spiritualist circles, via direct authorship from beyond the grave. Several authors claimed to mediate new novels written by Corelli's spirit; the last, *No Matter*, was published in 1969 by Cyril Wild, who claimed that Marie had chosen, on this occasion, to co-author with a Tibetan monk.[91] Such posthumous authorship might suggest that Corelli ultimately changed her mind about associating with movements like Spiritualism and Theosophy. On a more serious note, it certainly indicates the degree to which her fiction absorbed and transmitted the various esoteric concepts which she either wove into the basket of her belief system or placed somewhat uncomfortably inside it. She may have intended her novels to be a blend of romantic entertainment and communication of a non-occult Christian Corelliism, but, by relying on esoteric materials to negotiate the heterotopian terrain between Christianity and science, Marie herself was responsible for the attraction of occultists to her work.

An exhaustive survey of the science fictional texts that contributed to occulture in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is quite beyond the scope of this project, as is a fully comprehensive understanding of occultism's influence on the dynamics of science fiction. I have tried to ameliorate this problem in this dissertation by taking the time for close readings and biographical analysis of three indicative examples in which both a science fictional occultism and an occult science fiction could emerge from esoteric knowledge and experience. This approach has allowed me to carefully portray some of the unique dynamics that brought two apparently

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[89] Colville, *Human Aura*, p. 5.
[90] Bryan, pp. 14–17.
[91] Masters, pp. 302–03.

unlike traditions into a close entanglement that has never, despite appearances, untangled itself. For the remainder of this chapter I will focus on occultism's contributions to the development of science fiction, but we must remember that in transforming and de-exoticising occult phenomena, SF often participated in creating new forms of occulture. Science fictional texts which deployed esoteric materials could either continue to influence occultism by storing its concepts for a later reawakening in an esoteric context, or could themselves emerge as occulture.

Shaping the mega-text: mesmerism, Spiritualism, Theosophy

Science fiction has proven a key resource for the imagery and concepts of various occult traditions, but the reverse influence of modern esotericism on SF has perhaps been even more impactful. There is a large and diverse corpus of SF texts that engaged with occult materials in the period. I cannot reproduce this complexity here, but I would like to profile a number of indicative texts influenced by occultism, alongside the works of Bulwer, Britten, and Corelli which I have already described. As a result of epistemic pressure to adapt esoteric concepts so that they were compatible with the currents of enframing, a variety of traditions that played a part in the occult revival could prove useful for generating an SF mode. We have seen that Corelli managed to present mystical Rosicrucian symbolism and initiation within a scientised framework in her novels, while the spiritual science of Britten's Chevalier includes experimentation with occult practices from crystallomancy to ritual magic. Mark Morrisson has shown that even alchemy, which had a strong spiritual focus in modern occultism, proved of interest to SF writers in the Gernsback-era pulps after a revival of physical, laboratory-based alchemy among physicists including Ernest Rutherford in the early twentieth century.[92] Interest in the alchemical elixir of life, which, as Wolff notes, was already one of the 'commonplaces of romantic fiction',[93] followed this trend. SF texts including Pope's *Journey to Mars* (p. 314), Corelli's *Young Diana* (pp. 176–83, 208–10), Lloyd's *Etidorhpa* (p. 34), and *The Great Romance* (1881), by a mysterious New Zealander known only as 'The Inhabitant',[94] adapted this trope — structured by a swirling blend of outdated scientific theory, mystical significance, and a general human interest in immortality — in order to naturalise it and make it palatable with scientific discourse. Aside from Corelli, there is no evidence that these authors had any substantial interest in occultism, but their texts

[92] Morrisson, pp. 5–9, 139.
[93] Wolff, p. 226.
[94] 'The Inhabitant', p. 9. This text is largely forgotten but seems to have had a significant influence on Edward Bellamy. See Alessio, pp. xv–xxii.

still mirror the serious play of occultists bent on proselytisation, deploying scientised esoteric concepts to generate a science fictional combination of verisimilitude and wonder.

Of all the occult movements with which early SF engaged, however, the three which I have touched on most in this dissertation — magical mesmerism, Spiritualism, and Theosophy — had the most impact on the development of science fiction's tropes, themes, and rhetorical strategies. Mesmerism appears in countless texts in the period. We have seen that Bulwer's interest in physical, trance-based, and magical mesmerism led to his influential conception of vril, as well as a theory of telepathy proposed in fiction well before the SPR formulated a similar concept. Bulwer was preceded by important early-century mega-textual nodes, particularly German author E.T.A. Hoffman, who, as Martin Willis has shown, brought 'mesmerism, mechanics, and magic' together as he reconnoitred the same liminal ground traversed by Bulwer, between ancient and modern, magical and scientific knowledges.[95] Hoffman influenced a number of early SF writers who followed, including Poe, who was also an enormous fan of Bulwer's work,[96] and who explored mesmerism in 'Mesmeric Revelation', 'A Tale of the Ragged Mountains', and 'The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar' (all 1843–1844). Poe's degree of serious play is difficult to assess, but Sidney Lind has argued that these texts are 'serious fiction' motivated by Poe's conviction that mesmerism was 'a valid and efficacious sub-branch of science', a belief partly supported by Poe's admiration for Townshend's *Facts in Mesmerism*.[97] Poe preceded authors like Britten and Corelli in claiming that his tales were scientific accounts of actual events. Unlike Britten and Corelli, he quickly retracted this claim, but, as Willis argues, the effect still replicated other 'cultural engagements with the claims of science',[98] and thus lent the story, for a time, a further degree of verisimilitude.

The serious application of mesmerism to fiction by authors like Poe and Bulwer influenced later authors who probably had little interest in mesmerism itself but adopted its ludic potential from these earlier stories. I have already noted the intertextual relationship between Bulwer's mesmerist fictions and George Griffith's *Olga Romanoff* and *The Vril Staff* by 'X.Y.Z.'. Another such chain of influence is traced by Dominic Alessio, who notes that *The Great Romance* by 'The Inhabitant' seems to draw on the telekinetic and telepathic powers of the Vril-ya, and explains them with a similar appeal to a pervading magnetic current.[99] Alessio argues that *The Great Romance*, though largely forgotten in proceeding decades, maintained a significant mega-textual

[95] Willis, p. 62. Cf. pp. 28–62; Tatar, p. 123.
[96] See Pollin.
[97] Lind, pp. 1086, 1093.
[98] Willis, p. 131. Cf. pp. 116–32; Lind, p. 1094.
[99] Alessio, p. xxi.

presence as a result of its influence on Bellamy's immensely popular *Looking Backward* (1888).[100] *The Great Romance*'s only direct mention of mesmerism is in connection with the psychic powers of a man who wakes the hero in 2143 after the latter is placed in drugged suspension in 1950. Similarly, mesmerism facilitates time travel in Bellamy's novel, as the hero travels to the year 2000 after he is placed into a deep mesmeric sleep in 1887. Mesmeric sleep is also used by Pope in *Journey to Mars*, where, similar to the manner in which the Vril-ya communicate with Tish, Lieutenant Hamilton is thrown into a somnambular state so that 'magnetizers as you call them' among the Martians can learn English (p. 51). Bulwer may thus, as Sam Moskowitz argues, also have influenced Pope. This would constitute another significant mega-textual impact for Bulwer, as *Journey to Mars* was likely a central influence on Edgar Rice Burroughs's *Barsoom* series.[101] Indeed, there are similar instances of mesmerist mind powers in these novels.[102] As I will argue further below, explorations of mesmerism in fiction were important contributors to a range of similar tropes, including telekinesis, telepathy, and mind control.

Spiritualism and psychical research also proved key contexts for the nineteenth-century development of some of science fiction's central epistemological and rhetorical strategies.[103] Though the approaches and ontologies of Spiritualists and psychical researchers could be quite distinct, they often blur together in science fiction, where the most radical cosmologies and mediumship technologies could be explored while still grounded with a verisimilitude cast by scientific discourse and appeal to empirical method. Thus, the rhetorics and mechanics of seriously considered, scientised ghost stories such as those in W.T. Stead's *Real Ghost Stories* (1891), are also of relevance to the history of SF. It is in this spirit that Bulwer's *Haunted* creates an SF mode through the scientific method with which the characters conduct their research into spirit phenomena, ultimately generating the naturalistic explanatory mechanism of telepathy.

The most famous example of an author whose serious play resulted in Spiritualist science fiction is Arthur Conan Doyle, whose well-known interest in psychical research and Spiritualism manifested in a number of publications. 'Playing with Fire' (1900) has a primarily gothic aesthetic, but much of the story is devoted to theories of mediumship devolved from psychical research. The themes and plot of 'The Great Keinplatz Experiment' (1919) are built around an anatomist's attempt to systematise a scientific approach to mesmerism and Spiritualism. In the same year

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[100] Ibid. pp. xv–xxii.

[101] Moskowitz, np.

[102] See, e.g., Burroughs, p. 123.

[103] Spiritualism has received very little attention as a possible precursor to science fiction or influence on it. Stephen Burt observes that 'nineteenth-century American spiritualism can look like SF *avant la lettre*' (p. 171). but does not assess the impact of this material on the SF mega-text, choosing instead to evaluate Elizabeth Stuart Phelps's *The Gates Ajar* (1868), which, as Burt himself admits, has very little of SF about it (p. 172).

that Conan Doyle published *The History of Spiritualism* (1926), he explored the facts and frauds of Spiritualism in the last novel of his Professor Challenger series, *The Land of Mist.* The always skeptical Challenger is initially hostile to Spiritualist claims, but after his wife appears in spirit form and his daughter begins to display mediumship abilities, he becomes convinced.

Most Spiritualist SF, however, was produced by authors with no known link to the movement. An early example, published at the height of the Spiritualist furore in America, is Fitz-James O'Brien's *The Diamond Lens*. In search of a stronger microscope, Linley consults a medium named Madame Vulpes. She is able to contact the spirit of van Leeuwenhoek, who describes a method by which Linley invents a more powerful lens. The text takes time, in the manner of both the SF mode and Spiritualist descriptions of séances, to empirically substantiate the identity of van Leeuwenhoek, the mediumship of Vulpes, and the spirit telegraphy and automatic writing with which communication between the two is achieved. Faced with such evidence, Linley is left with only one alternative to Spiritualist belief — that the medium has read his mind. Even this, he decides, is not explanation enough, and 'there was no course left but to become a convert' to Spiritualism.[104]

O'Brien's text also represents an early example of a common theme in Spiritualist SF — the achievement of spirit communication through technological innovation. Spiritualists frequently deployed technological metaphors — particularly related to telegraphy — to argue for the naturalistic function of spirit mediumship,[105] and also invented actual machines with which to make mediumship more reliable or ensure its authenticity. I have already noted the example of Dr Robert Hare, a professor of chemistry at the University of Pennsylvania, who converted to Spiritualism for much the same reason as O'Brien's Linley; having built six 'spiritoscopes' to debunk Spiritualist claims, Hare found that actually his experimental results substantiated them.[106] Unsurprisingly, a number of texts can be found playing with this technologisation of occult communications. The eponymous machine of John J. Meyer's *20000 Trails Under the Universe with the Cerebroscope* (1917) enables communication with the dead, as does the Atlantean technology of Olof W. Anderson's *The Treasure Vault of Atlantis* (1925). We have seen that the spirit phenomena of Bulwer's *Haunted* are also made possible by a machine that magnifies occult forces, while Britten's Chevalier journeys through the universe via clairvoyance magnified by galvanic batteries (p. 363). Spiritualism could also provide a solution to failures of technology. After the protagonist is accidentally disintegrated in Arthur Morgan and Charles R.

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[104] O'Brien, p. 15. See pp. 12–16 for Madame Vulpes scene.
[105] See Noakes, 'Telegraphy Is an Occult Art'; Gutierrez, pp. 49–50; Moore, p. 22.
[106] Gutierrez, pp. 61–63.

Brown's *The Disintegrator: A Romance of Modern Science* (1892), his later reintegration is only possible because he has lived on in spirit form in the interim.

Perhaps the most sustained fictional exploration of Spiritualist technology, however, is Louis Pope Gratacap's *The Certainty of a Future Life in Mars.* Gratacap, using a paranarratorial strategy similar to that of Corelli, presents himself as the editor of the 'Posthumous Papers of Bradford Torrey Dodd', which largely transcribe the adventures of Dodd and his father as they discover spirit life on Mars and a method of communication with the Martians (p. 15). Dodd Sr, a talented scientist and engineer, 'fortunately [does] not have recourse to the fruitless idiocy of spiritualism', but he nevertheless has an intuition that his wife's spirit has reincarnated on Mars. The Dodds are thus motivated to invent wireless telegraphy before Guglielmo Marconi, having heard of Heinrich Hertz's experimental proof of magnetic waves along which it was thought sound might travel (pp. 22, 25–26). The Dodds construct an apparatus that enables long-distance wireless telegraphy, sensitive to magnetic waves that Dodd Sr believes to criss-cross the universe. When Senior dies and also reincarnates on Mars, he is able to contact Junior with similar, already extant Martian technology, thus confirming the existence of life on other planets, the immortality of the human spirit, and the ability to communicate with spirits in other realms and other states of existence.

Gratacap's novel seems to owe as much to Theosophy as it does to Spiritualism. Humans arrive on Mars in spirit form, but over time they reincarnate into 'corpuscular bodies'; Mars is thus populated by both spirits and people of 'flesh and blood' (p. 80). This embrace of interplanetary reincarnation networks with Theosophy, which theorised that the eternal aspects of the self, entire species, and even the universe itself developed through cycles of reincarnation which took place over eons of time and vast stretches of the cosmos.[107] Indeed, though Dodd is antagonistic to Spiritualism, he is quite willing to attribute his discoveries to Theosophy, noting that the 'whole central fancy of reincarnation' first struck him after reading 'Colonel Olcutt's (sic) Esoteric Buddhism' in 1882 (p. 27). Olcott wrote no text matching this description, but as Sinnett produced *Esoteric Buddhism* in 1883 we can assume this text to be a source for Gratacap's novel. Dodd's favouring of Theosophy represents efforts by the movement to distance itself from Spiritualism, based on its adoption of Hindu and Buddhist concepts, particularly a doctrine of reincarnation which most Anglo-American Spiritualists rejected.[108] As in Gratacap's novel, however, the reality of its relationship with other occult movements was more complex. Theosophists shared the tendency to adapt traditional esoteric phenomena to the demands of

[107] See Hammer, pp. 257–59, 462.
[108] See Hammer, pp. 464–69.

enframing;[109] as a result of this and other shared influences and priorities,[110] they were frequently the same people as those attending séances or joining occult societies like the Golden Dawn.

The mesmerist, Spiritualist, and magical phenomena found in science fiction also became frequently blended with Theosophical concepts as the movement grew in popularity. Francis Worcester Doughty, for example, plays with concepts which he refers to variously as 'occult' or 'theosophic' in *Mirrikh; or, a Woman from Mars* (1892). Much like Gratacap's later novel, *Mirrikh* imagines travel to Mars along occultist lines. Three adventurers are guided by Mirrikh, a Martian visiting Earth, to a lamasery in the impenetrable fastnesses of Tibet, where they discover a system that has been allowing souls travelling from other planets to incarnate in quasi-human bodies. Mirrikh inhabits one such body which has been adapted by the focused will of previous Martian soul-inhabitants to represent that of actual Martians. He looks, the adventurers find, exactly like the Martians described by Swedenborg in *De Telluribus*, the Swedish visionary's account of his spirit journeys to other planets. In addition to this Swedenborgian connection, Mirrikh is capable of mesmerist thought control, clairvoyant vision, and magical action via communication with elemental spirits.

Most of George du Maurier's *The Martian* is a relatively straight-forward, if slightly surreal, episodic mock-biography, but the last quarter of the novel generates an SF mode from a similar blend of Spiritualist and Theosophical ideas surrounding reincarnation. Another Martian has made her way to Earth in this novel. Where Mirrikh inhabits a body placed in suspended (dis)animation while it awaits the arrival of an animating spirit from other planets, Martia shares living bodies with their host spirits until she discovers Barty Josselin, who is able to sense her presence and communicate with her as a result of the genetic mutation which has developed a new extra-sensory organ in his brain. Martia has vague memories of 'countless incarnations, from the lowest form to the highest' on Mars (p. 375). Based on the evolutionary experience of the superior, but now declining Martian race, Martia combines reincarnation with eugenics to predict a similar superhuman future for the inhabitants of Earth. Through selective breeding of Barty's descendants, man will have the 'greatness of his ampler, subtler, and more complex brain', an increased 'sense of the Deity', and 'will have in him the magnetic consciousness of the entire solar system, and hold the keys of time and space' (pp. 416–17). A hollow Earth race of 'Terrans' in John Mastin's *The Immortal Light* (1907) are on a similar path of evolution via continued reincarnation. Like the superhumans of Bulwer's *Coming Race*, The Inhabitant's *Great Romance*,

[109] Asprem, 'Theosophical Attitudes Towards Science'.
[110] See Oppenheim, pp. 164–68.

and Bellamy's 'To Whom This May Come', one of the groups of Terrans encountered in the novel is identified as further along this reincarnational cycle because of its development of telepathy.

Reincarnation might seem like the ultimate limit case for a concept of relevance to science fiction, but it was a recurring motif in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century science fiction, largely, I would argue, because of its popularisation and advocacy by Theosophists and, to a lesser extent, Spiritualists.[111] Unlike more centrally science-fictional tropes, reincarnation does not directly lend mega-textual significance to a text — a mechanism that can transport characters through time has, unsurprisingly, proven attractive to authors of many modes and genres. A number of texts, however, are like Sinnett's *Karma* in that they take the time to legitimate the function of reincarnation via scientific discourse, epistemology, or method. Indeed, though the rapid growth of interest in reincarnation in the West in this period can certainly not be traced to Sinnett alone,[112] *Karma* joined publications like *Esoteric Buddhism* in playing a major role in the Theosophical Society's popularisation of this and other heavily adapted Buddhist ideas into Western thought.[113] The cultural and intellectual reach of this (weakly) scientised theory of reincarnation is indicated by its inclusion in *To Mars Via the Moon* (1911), a novel by Mark Wicks, an amateur astronomer and member of the British Astronomical Association, best known for advocating fellow hobby astronomer Percival Lowell's theory that the canals identified by Schiaparelli on the surface of Mars indicated the existence of established civilisations.[114] Wicks included human reincarnation on Mars as one of the imagined phenomena in his novel, all of which, he insisted, were based on projections of existing scientific knowledge.[115]

Theosophy also applied the cycle of death and rebirth to civilisations, planets, and the universe itself. Beginning with Blavatsky and proceeding with publications by Sinnett and Scott-Elliot, Theosophists outlined a system of cosmic evolution in which the present state of humanity was only one infinitesimal stage in a grand pattern of cyclical progress and recursion.[116] As Everett Bleiler notes, science fiction writers were quickly attracted to the colourful mythos of the Theosophical system of seven 'root-races', in which the 'Aryan' race of humans is situated in a recurring cycle of evolution.[117] Humans were proceeded by the 'Atlantean' race famously mentioned in Plato's *Timaeus*, which was in turn proceeded by the Lemurians, an even more

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[111] Anglo-American Spiritualists began to embrace reincarnation at around the same time as it became more central in Theosophy; both movements were influenced by French Spiritism, wherein reincarnation had been an established belief since mid-century (Hammer, p. 464.).

[112] See Hammer, pp. 455–56 on the rapid spread of reincarnation in the nineteenth century.

[113] Chajes, pp. 73–74.

[114] See Hetherington, pp. 303–08.

[115] Wicks, pp. 169ff.

[116] Chajes, pp. 74–80; Hammer, pp. 257–58.

[117] Bleiler, p. 852.

advanced predecessor. Both races were possessed of mental powers like telepathy, and both were of a more spiritual, ethereal matter; indeed, the Lemurians had been the first race in the cycle to take on physical form. Theosophists believed that this cycle of evolution would soon progress forward again — indeed, that it was already doing so for select individuals — so that humanity would once more become of a more spiritual essence, capable of mental powers and not weakened by the failings that led to their downfall, such as the overzealous rationalism and materialism of the Atlanteans.[118]

Early Theosophical histories of the root-races, such as Scott-Elliot's *The Story of Atlantis* and *The Lost Lemuria* (1904), already possess, for the non-Theosophist reader, many elements consistent with a science fiction story. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, to find them used by a number of significant SF authors, particularly in the first half of the twentieth century. This lineage has been observed by a number of SF historians. L. Sprague de Camp notes that the Martians of Burroughs's *Barsoom* stories 'were essentially Theosophical Atlanteans and Lemurians, removed to a Mars based upon the then popular theories of the astronomer Percival Lowell'.[119] De Camp proposes that Burroughs must have come under the 'whimsical spell' of Theosophy,[120] and Fritz Leiber also believes that Burroughs likely 'found background material in the cults flourishing right around him' in California,[121] but neither has been able to find evidence of these connections. Indeed, in gathering these views on Burroughs and Theosophy together, Dale Broadhurst observes that Burroughs wrote the first *Barsoom* tales in Illinois, not California.[122] Another Burroughs scholar, Robert B. Zeuschner, has argued that his representations of reincarnation in the *Barsoom* stories indicate a poor understanding of Buddhist and Hindu conceptions,[123] but this may actually indicate that Theosophy's somewhat confused adaptations of reincarnation are a more likely source of influence for the author.

As I have tried to make clear in this survey of various mega-textual intersections between occultism and science fiction, no actual exposure to Theosophy would have been required for Burroughs to incorporate its ideas. The number of Theosophists writing fiction — and fiction writers writing Theosophy — would have allowed Burroughs to encounter both reincarnation and the Theosophical root races in prior works of fiction. Sam Moskowitz suggests, for example, that the mind powers, Lemurian dinosaurs and giants, and declining civilisations Burroughs placed on

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[118] See Chajes, pp. 80–88; Kripal, *Mutants and Mystics*, pp. 49–54.

[119] de Camp, *Ancient Ruins and Archaelogy*, p. 232.

[120] de Camp, 'Thoats, Tharks and Thews', p. 21.

[121] Fritz Leiber, 'John Carter: Sword of Theosophy', *Amra*, September 1959, excerpted in Broadhurst, np.

[122] Ibid.

[123] Zeuschner, np.

Mars may have been influenced by Pope's *Journey to Mars*.[124] This is only one of many Theosophically inspired SF texts which Burroughs might have encountered. To give just one more example of note, in C.C. Dail's *The Stone Giant* (1898), a sequel of sorts to his *Willmoth the Wanderer; or, The Man From Saturn* (1890), a race of Atlanteans is created with the help of descendants from a more advanced Saturnian race, reflecting the Theosophical belief that extra-terrestrials were operative in the evolution of the races on Earth.

Science fiction thus found both kinship and succour in occultism's heterotopian approach to various binaries that defined the intellectual and cultural experience of the nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century self: natural and supernatural, rational and irrational, ancient and modern, empiricism and experience, science and religion, enchantment and disenchantment, power and insignificance, and seriousness and play. In harmonising these dichotomies, SF was most likely to turn to occult movements and ideas when they themselves had already sought the deconstruction of such binaries through appeals to scientific legitimacy. It was thus traditions like mesmerism, Spiritualism, and Theosophy — rather than more explicitly mystical and spiritual currents like spiritual alchemy and Rosicrucianism — that proved most useful to SF authors attempting to cast a spell of enframed verisimilitude on their readers.

The mind, alterity, and the tropes of science fiction

Out of its engagement with occult science and psychical research, SF developed a number of tropes that remain key components in identifying a way of thinking, writing, or reading as science fictional. Tropes are central to Broderick's concept of the mega-text. Noting that SF writers seek out 'every possible modulation' of what he calls the genre's 'icons', Broderick observes that nevertheless 'all these variants bear certain family resemblances, and tend to cohere about a limited number of narrative vectors.'[125] Science fiction's tropes thus contain both an enormous amount of assumed meanings and associations *and* the potential for revivification in any text in which they appear: 'the image or concept of the sf emblem remains parsable as a new noun or verb, a signifier which posts notice to us of an "absent signified", an empirically empty but imaginatively laden paradigm' (p. 61). If this survey of interactions between SF and the religio-scientific knowledge of occultism has shown anything, however, it is that this last element of Broderick's theorisation of SF's icons overstates the case. Broderick acknowledges that SF tropes contain 'inscribed context', but denies them continued agency as 'real-world referents'.[126] Tropes

[124] Moskowitz, np.
[125] Broderick, *Reading by Starlight*, p. 60.
[126] Broderick, *Transrealist Fiction*, p. 27.

like telepathy or the extra-terrestrial, however, exist both as signs in themselves *and* as signifiers that can be adapted and shaped for new purposes, new meanings, and new external significations.

Thus, though SF develops tropes in a manner similar to any other cultural form, it is somewhat unique in that these tropes continue to engage with real-world knowledge, shaping human perspectives of events, experiences, and technologies, and allowing themselves to be transformed in the process. Here we find another plane on which SF and occultism intersect. As I have discussed elsewhere following Andreas Kilcher and Joshua Gunn, occultist forms of expression, while always entangled with a variety of other motifs found all over the globe and through millennia, are notable for their unusually fluid approach to knowledge.[127] Occultists developed modern, scientised forms of esoteric knowledge in the context of traditions like kabbalah, alchemy, and magic that, in Kilcher's terms, thrived 'upon the *narrativity*, even the inventability (*inventio*) of knowledge'.[128] Gunn has described how, unlike traditional religions which tend to insist on the established logos of sacred texts, this quality of *inventio* results in an unusually prolific production of neologisms in occult discourse, a semantic fertility which, as we have seen, science fiction shares.[129] A trope is usually more substantial and encompassing than a neologism, but Gunn's observation can be productively applied to occultism's continual adaptation of symbols and concepts as well. Thus, for example, the Philosophers' Stone of alchemy has been transmuted into a variety of forms, including Christ, the Holy Grail, the elixir of life, and the spiritual self. Frequently, such transmutations occur in tandem with fiction. As Mark Rose argues, the SF trope of a rogue scientist in possession of previously undiscovered power can be seen as a manifestation of the centuries-old icon of the magus.[130]

We have already encountered another indicative example of how this transmogrification of trope can occur in science fiction in the case of vril, which has retained the identity given to it by Bulwer in *The Coming Race* but has also received a number of new non-fictional signifiers through a process of innovation by a variety of occult actors, including the Vril-ya Club, Blavatsky, William Walker Atkinson, and proto-Nazi secret societies, in addition to science fiction authors including 'The Inhabitant', Corelli, and X.Y.Z. A variety of other tropes arose from the intersection of SF and occultism as well — Atlantis, the superhuman, reincarnation, undiscovered occult forces, and scientist-mages are all examples that have appeared in the texts examined thus far, and which have continued to appear in SF since. At this point, however, I would like to conclude this

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[127] Roukema, pp. 113–19.
[128] Kilcher, p. 147.
[129] Gunn, p. 43. See pp. 102–06.
[130] Rose, pp. 8–9.

discussion of the occult science fictional mega-text by highlighting several defining tropes of science fiction which have either emerged from SF's encounter with occultism, or have been significantly adapted by it. These tropes arose from two more areas of intersection vital to the co-dependent development of SF and occultism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: 1) radical hypotheses concerning the mind and its powers — from which emerged tropes including telepathy, extra-sensory perception (ESP), and forms of instantaneous mind-based space travel, and 2) alterity, the encounter with the unknown or the abjected that is most frequently represented in the figure of the extra-terrestrial.

Psychic tropes

It is likely not a coincidence that most of science fiction's mind power tropes developed in a period in which scientific approaches to the mind were themselves in their infancy. Nineteenth-century mental physiologists made key discoveries about the nature and function of the mind, but uncertainty and hypothesis were more common than established paradigms and mental science was thus open to a variety of contested theories and frameworks. The study of the mind faced unique scientific challenges as mind-based concepts like will and consciousness easily evaded the tools of conventional empirical research. Thus, while naturalists and materialists did not necessarily dismiss the study of the mind, they might describe it, as Huxley did, in terms of two different worlds: 'Though there is a most intimate relation and interconnection between the two, the bridge from one to the other has yet to be found'.[131] Without even methodological consensus, let alone an established ontology and knowledge set on which to build further research, mental science of the period was open to a wide range of concepts, approaches, hypotheses, and attempts at disciplinary formation, and the boundaries between professional and amateur researchers were relatively weak compared to other disciplines.[132]

In these contested epistemological and methodological spaces, there was room for occultists and psychical researchers to gain significant purchase with theories of psychic power and paranormal experience. As a number of scholars have illustrated, research interest in phenomena like the trance state, the dreaming mind, telepathy, and clairvoyance played an important role in scientific discovery. Though physiologists like George Beard saw the trance state as 'a refuge and a hiding-place for the world's great imposters',[133] there is no doubt that movements we now see as pseudoscientific or occult played an important part in neurological discoveries and

[131] Huxley, 'Scientific and Pseudo-Scientific Realism', p. 62.
[132] Anger; Matus, p. 1260.
[133] Beard, 'New Theory of Trance', p. 32.

understandings of human psychology.[134] Occult mental science was assisted by discoveries in other fields, particularly physics, which boggled the expectations of ordinary experience, thus undermining the basis of conventional empiricist method and enhancing the argument of occultists and psychical researchers that alternate methods and technologies would soon reveal the extent of the mind's latent potential.[135]

Occultism and science fiction met once again around the table at which a range of voices debated the present or future powers of the mind. On this table some of science fiction's central tropes were moulded. Abilities like telepathy, clairvoyance, telekinesis, and divination occupy an unstable place in mega-textual thinking, perhaps, as Susan Stone-Blackburn suggests, because of their equally tenuous position in the scientific community.[136] This has been a particular problem in SF criticism, where even scholars like Damien Broderick, who identifies the many important exchanges between fringe mental science and 'psience fiction', reject similar nineteenth-century stories about 'psi' powers as the 'domain of 19th century mediums and swamis and spiritists'.[137] In this view they are not, as Peter Lowentrout also argues, comparable to later SF, where 'scant room has been left for the lawless occult'.[138] Stone-Blackburn's valuable 'Consciousness Evolution and Early Telepathic Tales' highlights the short-sightedness of leaving out either the nineteenth century or the occult in our attempts to understand 'psience fiction'. Stone-Blackburn's analysis of texts by Poe, Bulwer, and Bellamy suffers from a lack of familiarity with occult science and psychical research, which leads her to characterise both psychic powers and 'psience fiction' as 'the other side of rationalism'.[139] However, she emphasises the centrality of concepts of mental evolution and telepathy in nineteenth-century SF, noting, like Luckhurst, that both psychic powers and science fiction thrive in the poorly understood, hypothetical spaces at 'the margins of science'.[140]

Although it was not the psychic phenomenon of most interest to nineteenth-century mental physiology and psychical research — spirit mediumship and the trance state both attracted more interest — telepathy is the most prevalent SF trope to have evolved from the meeting of SF and occultism in the strange sciences of the mind. Telepathy is found in dozens of novels of the period, sometimes dissociated from its cultural and intellectual roots, but just as often continuing to dialogue with occult science and psychical research. We have seen that Bulwer used telepathy

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[134] See Schmit, pp. 42–44; Crabtree, *From Mesmer to Freud*; Winter, *Mesmerized*; Owen, *Place of Enchantment*, p. 6.

[135] Schmit, p. 42.

[136] Stone-Blackburn, p. 241.

[137] Broderick, *Psience Fiction*, p. 4.

[138] Lowentrout, pp. 394–95.

[139] Stone-Blackburn, p. 244.

[140] Ibid. p. 249; Luckhurst, 'Pseudoscience', p. 405.

in *Haunted* and *Strange Story* as an explanation for paranormal experience. Telepathy also performs this function in Doughty's *Mirrikh*, where the novel's sceptic, Doctor Philpot, works from the same confluence of mesmerism, psychical research, and mental physiology to provide a naturalistic explanation for ghosts and levitation. Basing his arguments on mesmerism, which 'is, of course, an admitted fact', Philpot proposes that minds can impress thoughts and sensation on other minds via a 'mental magnetic current' (p. 74). He thus argues that though there is 'no such thing as a disembodied spirit', through telepathic impression the mind's experience of spirit manifestation and communication can seem legitimate.

Telepathy is thus, as it was for the SPR, a key explanatory mechanism in attempts to situate ancient magical knowledge and occult experience within a modern techno-scientific framework. This modernising function is also the basis of Bellamy's 'To Whom This May Come', where the mysterious islanders are descended from Persian soothsayers and magicians, banished by the Parthian kings out of fear for their 'especial gifts in the way of hypnotizing, mind-reading, thought transference, and such arts' (p. 460). Telepathy also mediates between ancient and modern knowledge in Corelli's novels. Not only is it a result of the communication of 'vibrations of the human brain' via fluid similar to electricity and animal magnetism, it is an ancient phenomenon, 'well-known to the priests of ancient Egypt' (*SL*, p. 33).

At the same time as it provided an opportunity to update the past for the present, however, telepathy also looked to the future. Bellamy's story, like Bulwer's *Coming Race*, profiles telepathy as a harbinger of the next race that will supersede humanity. This conflation of thought transfer with evolutionary narrative was common in occultism and psychical research as well, as encapsulated by Myers's identification of telepathy as a sign of the ongoing 'progenerate' evolution of humanity.[141] Bellamy may have been influenced in this direction by Bulwer, but also by *The Great Romance*, in which the evolution of a superhuman race has occurred by 2143, largely because of rapid, species-wide development of mental communication. Lloyd's *Etidorhpa* also brings telepathy and evolution together. When the anonymous hero, who calls himself 'I—Am—The—Man', notices that his thoughts are being read by a secret coterie of occult scientist-adepts that has kidnapped him, he wonders how this is done. Picking up his mental query, a telepathic adept explains that I—Am—The—Man has not yet awakened 'undeveloped senses' that will enable mental communication and 'the consideration of matter or force that is now subtle and evasive'. While the use of these senses is now 'esoteric', the knowledge possessed by the coterie will one day become exoteric: 'the vocal language of men will disappear, and humanity, regardless of nationality, will, in silence and even in darkness, converse eloquently

[141] Myers, I, 56.

together in mind language' (pp. 64–66). Telepathy is thus the medium of the de-exoticisation of both esoteric knowledge and its guardians; it is also the agent of a heterotopian synthesis of matter and spirit, occult secrecy and public science.

Telepathy often plays this heterotopian role in early science fiction. The ultimate ramification of the Dodds' discovery of a way to communicate with reincarnated spirit-beings in *Certainty of a Future Life in Mars* is the 'feeling that our human intelligence was the reflex or microcosmic re-presentation of the planning, upholding mind', in other words of an unspecified deity. To the Dodds this suggests that mind has 'no conceivable limitation', and that, following a process of mental and spiritual evolution, 'the human mind in an intelligent, satisfactory, self-illuminating way some day would reach mind everywhere in all its specific forms; and that the abyss of space would eventually thrill with the vibrations of conscious communion between remote worlds' (p. 29). Any reader of Olaf Stapledon's classic *Starmaker* will here recognise that influential novel's vision of a universe unified into a single being of agglomerated minds. Indeed, from Wells's unexplained attribution of telepathy to the Martians of *War of the Worlds*, to E.E. 'Doc' Smith's playful projection of the phenomenon, along with other psi powers, on a galactic scale in the *Lensman* series (1934–1948), to more serious exploration of psionic abilities by authors including A.E. van Vogt and L. Ron Hubbard under the editorial guidance of John W. Campbell, telepathy has remained an SF mainstay.[142] It continues, moreover, to be explored with similar evolutionary emphasis — as seen, for example, in Arthur C. Clarke's *Childhood's End* (1953; see below) — and for similarly heterotopian purposes as in earlier SF texts. In some of these texts telepathy resolves itself entirely as trope, largely reflecting previous usage, but in others it continues to dialogue with occult and parapsychological debates.

In recent works of SF, ideas of thought transference and mind sharing have been linked to advances in neurology and nanotechnology so that psionic exchange is now frequently mechanised. The neural network shared by humans in the process of merging cerebration with machinic databanks in Charles Stross's *Accelerando* (2005) allows precisely the sharing of image and sensation dreamed of by nineteenth-century poet-scientists like Bulwer.[143] The 'neural lace' of Iain M. Banks's *Culture* universe, which enables abilities from thought-based communication to the full-scale systematisation, copying, and replication of the wearer's consciousness, has motivated real-world attempts to create such technology, notably from Elon Musk's start-up, Neuralink. Blogger Tim Urban, after discussing this technology with Musk, has called Neuralink an

[142] See Luckhurst, 'Pseudoscience', pp. 408–10; Stableford, *Science Fact and Science Fiction*, p. 359.
[143] See, e.g., Stross, p. 123.

attempt to 'build a wizard's hat for the brain'. Urban, like the company itself, doesn't acknowledge Neuralink's magical past, but he understands the technology as promising a 'magical future'.[144]

Banks's neural lace and Musk's Neuralink join Knowles's 'brain-waves', Bulwer's mesmeric clairvoyance, and Myers's telepathy in a long history of continual adaptation, in which the concept of telepathy has maintained its inherent characteristics — including its magical heritage, prolepticity, and techno-scientific marginality — while constantly refreshing in response to different epistemological environments. There has, therefore, always been something in telepathy that is inherently science fictional. The conceptual environments in which it has been theorised have been typified by the same epistemological, social, and cultural conditions that gave rise to both occultism and science fiction and stand at the roots of their intersectionality. This flexible capacity has rendered telepathy a successful trope both in and outside of recognisably fictional boundaries. Its combination of phantasmagorical allure and continually updated pre-paradigmatic scientific status has allowed it to maintain its appeal to a broad spectrum of society, from trained neurologists to eccentric billionaires to science fiction fans.

Unsurprisingly, given that both abilities emerged from a confluence of mesmerism, Spiritualist mediumship, psychical research, and evolutionary theory, telepathy was often connected to clairvoyant visions of the future and visualisation of other spaces. Myers, for example, described telepathy as the 'prerequisite' of 'inward vision'.[145] This connection is also found in 'To Whom This May Come', where a recent 'slight acceleration' in evolution among the telepathic islanders has resulted in the acquisition of 'direct mental vision' (p. 460). Indeed, clairvoyance possessed many of the same attractions and qualities as telepathy, leading occultists and science fiction authors to deploy it in similar ways for similar purposes. Bulwer's *Strange Story* spends significant time debating the reality of clairvoyance, partly in order to suggest a modern scientific explanation for the ancient phenomenon of divination. The 'gift of the Pythoness' possessed by Fenwick's betrothed should thus 'be as apparent to the modern physiologist as [it was] to the ancient priest' (I,194). Similarly, once Dodd Sr is in possession of his Martian body in *Certainty of a Future Life in Mars*, he is aware that he has more acute mental senses and can thus 'anticipate things' (p. 164). Sinnett's Mrs. Lakesby cannot divine the future with her clairvoyant powers, but she can see images of the past embedded in the astral light, a use of the mind to both prove reincarnation and research the nature of past lives pursued by Theosophists, most notably 'virtuoso clairvoyant' Charles Leadbeater.[146]

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[144] Urban, np.
[145] Myers, I, 241.
[146] Hanegraaff, 'Theosophical Imagination', p. 32. Cf. pp. 26–34.

Clairvoyance thus provided a human technology for time travel, but it had a variety of other uses for both occultists and SF writers. Its primary function was an ulterior form of sensing and knowing, which P.B. Randolph called the 'power to see without eyes'.[147] In early science fiction, clairvoyance enables access to unknown realms from the quantum to the intergalactic, maintaining the expectations of verisimilitude because of its occult empiricism, but otherwise shattering the boundaries of known natural laws and their application. When the astronauts of Astor's *Journey in Other Worlds* arrive on Saturn and discover that it is populated by highly evolved spirit beings, both they and the reader benefit from the ability of these beings to clairvoyantly view the rest of the universe, thus enabling an early example of science fiction's now archetypal visions of the vastness of space. We have already seen that Britten's Chevalier achieves a similar vision when his clairvoyance is amped up by galvanic batteries.

H.G. Wells also found value in this long-range vision, on a less cosmic scale, in two early stories. 'The Remarkable Case of Davidson's Eyes' (1895) describes the experience of a lab technician, Davidson, whose body occupies North London while his vision resides on an island in the South Pacific, a fact later verified by a sailor who has witnessed the same space at the same time. In 'The Crystal Egg' (1897) an antique dealer named Cave discovers that a crystal on display in his shop is '*en rapport*' with a similar device on Mars, thus allowing visual communication with a Martian city (p. 276). These events are primarily optical, but they are also esoterically cerebral. Cave possesses undescribed powers that make it much easier for him to glimpse the Martian city through the crystal than for a young scientist acquaintance. Davidson's strange account sets the narrator of the earlier story 'dreaming of the oddest possibilities of intercommunication in the future, of spending an intercalary five minutes on the other side of the world' (p. 63).

Science fiction authors thus shared occultist excitement surrounding this powerful occult empirical tool with which to reach unseen or inaccessible aspects of the universe. For occultists, the existence of such expansive mental vision was the natural conclusion to be derived from a plethora of recorded psychic experiences. American Spiritualist A.B. Richmond, for example, agreed with conventional empiricism that 'the mind is only reached from the outside world through the avenues of the senses', but turned this credo on its head. Since the mind appeared to receive information not felt, seen, smelt, tasted, or heard, 'it is evident that there must be another sense […] as yet unrecognised by science.'[148] Richmond, like many esoteric thinkers in the period, referred to this vaguely construed extra sense as a 'sixth sense',[149] a usage which appears

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[147] Randolph, *Dealings with the Dead*, pp. 8–9.

[148] Richmond, p. 1.

[149] The term was already in use to describe a sense of intuition and was also used in the period to describe instinctive muscular reflexes (See Smith, '"The Sixth Sense"', p. 219).

in SF as early as du Maurier's *The Martian*, where Martia describes the Martians' possession of a sixth sense that gives them access to a cosmic 'magnetic current', enabling clairvoyant knowledge of both exterior physical space and the inner spaces of other minds (p. 365). Reference to this term, as well as to ESP, is much more common in later SF than 'clairvoyance', though the characteristics of such psionic abilities remain quite similar. The semantic shift is partly attributable to the efforts of Duke University parapsychologist J.B. Rhine to systematise an experimental approach to a gamut of psychic powers, including clairvoyance and telepathy, under the mantle of ESP.[150] Rhine was a direct influence on John W. Campbell, who was also a Duke student and a volunteer participant in some of Rhine's early experiments. Later, as the mega-textually influential editor of *Astounding Science Fiction*, Campbell would, as he told Rhine in a letter, encourage authors like Heinlein and van Vogt to 'use fiction to induce competent thinkers to attack such problems as […] psi-effects'.[151] Campbell's editorial guidance is thus a mid-twentieth-century reflection of Bulwer's decision to explore magic, alchemy, clairvoyance, mesmerism, and telepathy in *Strange Story* in order to stimulate further research into psychic phenomena.

Early science fiction also came together with occult movements in a mutual attraction to travel through outer space, and the scientific and religious possibilities of its exploration. As I will shortly discuss further, in the wake of early modern discoveries regarding the vast extent of the universe and the multiplicity of possible worlds, occultists and SF writers joined theologians, philosophers, and astronomers in envisioning alien life and civilisations, building on a current of intergalactic speculation already centuries old. This imaginal astronomy also, however, intersected with mental physiology and psychical research, as the mind posed, for some, the most promising avenue of space exploration. While space travel in later science fiction has, with the exception of teleportation of body or consciousness, been limited to various forms of physical transport via spaceship, early SF was much more creative. Poe envisions a trip to the moon in an air balloon in *The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaall* (1835), while Verne's lunar explorers make the trip via cannon in *From the Earth to the Moon* (1865). In *Heliondé*, Whiting's protagonist is able to travel to the Sun after he is condensed into etheric matter. Whiting also envisions a 'Meteoric Delivery Company' that could facilitate inter-planetary post via meteor (p. 222). Perhaps the most humorous projection of space travel technologies is Frances Trego

[150] Rhine, pp. xxix–xxx.
[151] See Luckhurst, 'Pseudoscience', p. 410.

Montgomery's decision to have his characters tour the solar system via robot elephant in *On a Lark to the Planets* (1904).[152]

Far more common, however, was a method of transport that may seem just as improbable to contemporary readers; namely, astral travel — the ability to move through space as thought, unimpeded by matter, either within or outside of the mind itself. Istvan Csicsery-Ronay argues that Hélène Smith's widely popularised visits to Mars in a trance state 'profoundly influenced' later instances of mental space travel in science fiction.[153] He gives three significant examples: In *A Princess of Mars* (1912), Burroughs transports a very physical double of John Carter to Mars after his hero focuses intently on the planet; David Lindsay's *Voyage to Arcturus* (1920) features a similarly poorly described journey; Olaf Stapledon spends significantly more ink exploring mental travel in *Starmaker*, where the hero intentionally launches his consciousness into the stars, merging with other sublimated minds as he does so until he is part of a unified galactic being equivalent, it eventually discovers of itself, to God. These texts are all certainly rooted in the 'mental traveling' that Flournoy's experiments were intended to examine, but Smith's adventures were not required reading for SF writers imagining clairvoyant travel through space. As early as 1656, the protagonist of Athanasius Kircher's *Itinerarium Exstaticum* takes an angel-guided trance tour of the heavens.[154] Bulwer's Zanoni puts himself in a trance state and is then 'coursing through the fields of space', where he sees 'the universe stretched visible beyond' and beholds the 'gossamer shapes' of the galaxy's spirit inhabitants (p. 382).

Nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century SF continued to use mental or imaginal travel to access outer space and imagine its environs and denizens. The narrator of Walter Cheney's *An Apocalypse of Life* (1893) travels at light speed through the universe in a form that mixes thought and spirit; the Saturnian spirit-beings of Astor's *Journey in Other Worlds* can travel via similar means; and X.Y.Z.'s *The Vril Staff* contains a strange story within the story in which the protagonist mentally travels to a planet orbiting the pole-star (pp. 235–63). No SF text of the period, however, had a greater effect on how future forms of occult space travel were envisaged than Britten's *Ghost Land*, where, as we have seen, Louis clairvoyantly travels through space, viewing extra-terrestrial beings, Spiritualist spheres, and extra-planetary civilisations.

Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke credits the novel, along with *Art Magic*, with first advancing the idea of astral projection that has fascinated occultists since, including the early Theosophists with

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[152] This level of variety in modes of space travel was already a feature of space exploration fiction prior to this period. See Ordway, pp. 35–48.

[153] Csicsery-Ronay, pp. 35–36.

[154] See Aldiss and Wingrove, p. 71. On space exploration prior to the nineteenth century, see Roberts, *History of Science Fiction*, pp. 45–48, 74–77; Evans, 'The Beginnings', p. 14.

whom Britten was acquainted.[155] This practice could, as in SF astronautics, be entirely based in mind power. This idea had already been pursued in magical mesmerism, where the Barberinist school developed a concept of a real 'I', which could be separated from the body through mesmerist trance, enabling somnambules to travel the world at hyperspeed.[156] Toward the end of the century, leading occultists described astral travel as an interaction with the imaginal planes of Lévi's astral light. As Alex Owen describes it, 'A complete second self, conceived as a subtle replica of the original, was created in the mind, and it was this second self that traveled in the Astral Light.'[157] Golden Dawn adepts used astral travel for a variety of purposes, space travel among them. I have already noted the astral voyages taken by Annie Horniman and Frederick Leigh Gardner in 1898 as they, like Hélène Smith, travelled to the planets in the solar system, detailing the geological and astronomical features they saw, as well as their encounters with extra-planetary inhabitants and civilisations.[158]

However, this form of mind-based astral travel was experienced alongside, and sometimes entirely intermingled with, other more physical or spirit-based conceptions. Astral travel is thus a representative example of the way in which the poorly charted terrain of the mind could enable the legitimation not only of mental phenomena, but of other knowledge claims that relied on non-material bases. We already see this blending of mind and spirit in order to transcend the limitations of matter in Emmanuel Swedenborg's influential descriptions of spirit-based travel to various extra-planetary civilisations. Though he believed that his spirit was 'conducted from place to place', he saw this as a 'change [of] the state of mind [so that] it approaches the state of another person who is so far distant'.[159] In a similar vein, A.J. Davis, heavily influenced by Swedenborg, described his own experiences of psychic travel on Earth and in space.[160] Many Spiritualist mediums claimed similar experiences.[161] Theosophy saw parallel ideas develop, as the astral travel with which Theosophists were most concerned was the projection of the 'etheric' or 'sidereal' body found in the Neoplatonic and Hermetic traditions and reinvigorated by Lévi.[162] This astral 'double' was also discovered, as Olcott described, in Hindu thought, where Theosophy found a 'middle nature' between the body and the 'divine principle', which, 'separated from the living body at will, projected to a distance, and animated by the full consciousness of the man' could 'acquire an actual perception of the "Divine" truth through the developed psychical senses'.

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[155] Goodrick-Clarke, 'Coming of the Masters', p. 125.
[156] Gauld, pp. 66–67.
[157] Owen, *Place of Enchantment*, pp. 127, 286n39.
[158] See ibid. pp. 1–3, 157–61.
[159] Swedenborg, *Arcana Coelestia,* no. 10734.
[160] Davis, *Magic Staff*, pp. 213–15, 321–22, 339–41.
[161] See Davenhall.
[162] Asprem, 'Parapsychology', pp. 150–52.

In addition to 'animating' this double, there were further roles for the mind in this projection, as a variety of meditative and trance-based practices descended from mesmerism could be used to effect it.[163]

Ghost Land makes visible the entanglements between the clairvoyant power of far-seeing and the actual travel of the soul or astral double. Though Louis's space journeys are enabled by 'clairvoyant vision' (p. 195), he also describes a point in one of these voyages where his 'spirit was lifted up into the spheres of responsive truth' (p. 200). At other points in the novel, moreover, he describes episodes of astral travel experienced with the help of von Marx and the Berlin Brotherhood. Convinced by mesmerism of the possibility of sending the 'atmospheric spirit' outside of the self, the Brotherhood develops this ability 'by repeated and patient experiments with their magnetic subjects' (p. 39). When thus separated from the body, Louis's clairvoyant powers are magnified, 'permitting my vision to take in an almost illimitable area of space' (pp. 22–23).

Britten's novel appeared shortly after another important science fictional work that relies on astral travel — Camille Flammarion's *Lumen*. This work combines Flammarion's interest in mediumship, his French Spiritist belief in the evolution of the reincarnated spirit, and his astronomical theories regarding the possibility of life on other planets. The result is a visionary, spirit-guided journey through the universe, speculating on human spirits reincarnated into divers alien life forms on a variety of other planets. Clive Davenhall has drawn links between *Lumen*, the accounts of Swedenborg and later Spiritualist mediums, and four early SF texts: Burroughs's *Princess of Mars*, Richard Ganthony's popular 1899 play, *A Message from Mars*, du Maurier's *The Martian*, and Wicks's *To Mars Via the Moon*.[164]

Corelli's depictions of astral space travel may also be influenced by Flammarion. She clearly admired the Frenchman, as she told the *Strand* in 1898 that she 'would rather stay at home with Camille Flammarion's latest volumes' than go to the theatre.[165] Flammarion may thus be among the sources for both her depiction of astral travel and her enthusiasm for reincarnation. Corelli, however, also appears to have been interested in something more akin to Theosophical astral projection. With the aid of planetary spirits and Heliobas's 'scientific power' (p. 196), the astral double of the Electric Woman is clearly projected from her body, enabling her to spend a day and a half travelling through the universe. El-Râmi's brother Feraz experiences clairvoyant glimpses of

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[163] Olcott, 'Common Foundation of All Religions', p. 89. Cf. Taves, pp. 221–22. On the importance of astral travel to the early Theosophical Society, see Deveney, *Astral Projection*.

[164] See Davenhall.

[165] Lawrence, p. 20.

the planet that the two men inhabited before their spirits were reborn on Earth in human form, but his soul also comes 'out of his body on an ethereal journey to the star-kingdoms' (*SL*, p. 240).

There are further mega-textual examples of such blended mind/spirit travel in early SF, including R. Norman Grisewood's *Zarlah the Martian* (1909), where the narrator travels astrally to Mars, and Thomas Blot's *The Man from Mars* (1891), which reverses the direction of travel so that a Martian travels to Earth via a technology called 'reflection' which he says is already explored by Earth's 'spiritualistic creed' (p. 22). Astral travel thus allowed fiction writers to explore other planets, or ferry extra-terrestrials to Earth, via mental travel faster than the speed of light yet, because of its roots in occult science and its legitimation strategies, apparently not in violation of natural law or scientific principle. It can thus be situated as an early example of science fictional technologies that tackle the narrative problem of exploring the galaxy within a manageable plot window and, indeed, within a character's lifespan. It is structurally comparable to the faster-than-light speed of 'hyperdrive' or 'warp drive' powered spaceships, both of which employ magical technologies and occult forces at speeds that violate known natural laws. It is even more similar, however, to teleportation, which also tends to focus on quickly transporting individuals rather than vehicles. Generally, science fictional texts deploy teleportation as a fully mechanistic trope, with nods here and there to particle physics, but there remains a chasm, one quite typical of science fiction, between the reality of quantum entanglement and the fantasy of instantaneous travel. The hyper-speed travel of the clairvoyant mind, astral double, or disembodied soul is closest, however, to consciousness transport, an SF trope still very much in development as we approach the mid-twenty-first century. Recent best-selling science fiction, including Banks's *Culture* series (1987–2012), Stross's *Accelerando*, and Ann Leckie's *Imperial Radch* trilogy (2013–2015), has imagined technologies which upload human consciousness in order to download it into new bodies, thus technologically enabling a number of the goals which nineteenth-century occultists sought to achieve, including immortality and instantaneous space travel. Not coincidentally, occultism, psychical research, and earlier science fictional explorations of the psychical realm are among a range of influences on late-twentieth-century Transhumanists like Ray Kurzweil, whose prediction of a swiftly approaching merging of digital technology and human consciousness has helped precipitate the development of this new trope in contemporary SF.

Alterity: spirit aliens and ethereal space

Early SF and occultism thus participated in shaping approaches to the problem of space travel that continue to influence both science fiction and the wider public imagination. In upgrading already extant spirit- and mind-based space travel motifs in response to the demands of

enframing, they made exploration of the solar system and surrounding galaxy seem possible. Thanks to occult scientific efforts in Spiritualism and Theosophy, astral travel seemed verisimilar in the period, in the same way that the entirely unproven technology of consciousness uploading can appear technoscientifically legitimate to us today. This enabling of space exploration brought SF and occultism together in a further area of intersection — the encounter with the alien and its civilisations.

This encounter is part of a larger concern with alterity — with the other, the rejected, and the abjected — that is frequently identified as a formative aspect of the genre. Alterity is, for example, a crucial aspect of the latter part of Suvin's definition of SF as a literature of 'cognitive estrangement'.[166] In the far-off places and times of science fiction

> aliens — utopians, monsters or simple differing strangers — are a mirror to man just as the differing country is a mirror for his world. But the mirror is not only a reflecting one, it is also a transforming one, virgin womb and alchemical dynamo: the mirror is a crucible.[167]

Historians of nineteenth-century science fiction have highlighted this encounter as a central dynamic of the period. In tandem and frequently overlapping with the lost race tales and exploration fantasies of the period, early SF envisioned civilisations and their inhabitants on newly discovered islands, inside a hollow Earth, and on other planets, a clear extension of the colonial encounter with the non-European 'other' ongoing around the globe.[168] Science fiction's roots in the gothic assisted in allegorising and abjecting such encounters with the other, beaming xenophobia and xenoglossia onto other planets and into other times.[169] SF thus rose, as Roberts describes it, as the 'dark subconscious to the thinking mind of imperialism',[170] a literary forum in which European assumptions of the white male and his preferred epistemological and social conditions could be both upheld and interrogated. As Patrick Brantlinger has observed, occultism oriented itself to the colonial era in a similar way. To the imperialist mindset, '"away" can never be "away"; nothing is foreign, not even death; the borderland itself becomes a new frontier to cross, a new realm to conquer.' Occultist projections of an extra-planetary life for the soul after physical death thus had 'complex, unconscious' connections to the European assumption of the right to colonise.[171]

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[166] See p. 5.

[167] Suvin, 'On the Poetics', p. 374. Cf. Roberts, *History of Science Fiction*, pp. 16–20, 55; Ketterer, *New Worlds for Old*, p. 15.

[168] Evans, 'Nineteenth-Century SF', p. 20; Roberts, *Science Fiction*, pp. 45–50; James, 'Science Fiction by Gaslight', pp. 32–33; Seed, *Anticipations*, p. x.

[169] See Aldiss and Wingrove, pp. 25, 64.

[170] Roberts, *Science Fiction*, p. 50.

[171] Brantlinger, 'Gothic Origins', p. 249.

Science fiction's encounter with alterity is not limited to abjections of the anxieties of self and society, or attempts to contain or define the other. In carrying out heterotopian mediations of knowledge that lay between or beside dominant religious or scientific ontologies, SF and occultism also facilitated encounters between various reality claims and their epistemological others. A famous early science fictional example, as David Seed illustrates, is Edwin A. Abbott's *Flatland* (1884), which calls on the reader to recognise 'the relative nature of cultural perception',[172] as it profiles a denizen of a two-dimensional universe encountering both the ontological terror of a single-dimensional reality and the sublime wonder of a three-dimensional one like our own.

Esotericism emerges from a similar problematic. It is often seen, in Hanegraaff's terms, as 'the logical counterpart, the rhetorical "Other," of what we might refer to as the "Enlightenment" form of thought',[173] thus providing a knowledge space from which cultural forms like science fiction can draw to construct concepts and images that are presented as the other of the currents of enframing. As we have seen time and again in this dissertation, however, modern esotericism rarely accepts this rejected status. Occultists saw their ideas not as opposed to post-Enlightenment thought, but as the fulfilment of rationalism and empiricism, a necessary correction to materialism, and an expansion of naturalism. It is precisely this conjoined status of epistemological rejectedness *and* appeal for acceptance that enabled traditions like Spiritualism and Theosophy to provide symbolic materials that, at one and the same time, both upheld normative epistemologies *and* enabled their subversion and interrogation. Roberts observes that SF is defined not so much by a general encounter with difference, but by 'the *problematic* of this encounter with difference, the difficulty of representing the other without losing touch with the familiar'.[174] Esoteric knowledge has long assisted in this dual encounter — at the same time as its apparent alterity is mined for phantasmal qualities, SF narratives can simultaneously build on the epistemic familiarity resultant from occultism's attempts at scientific legitimacy. Science fiction thus frequently turned to occultism at the same time as it turned to unknown geographies, alien beings, and fantastic futures in order to perform its oscillation between the familiar and the strange.

This shared interest in encounter with ontological alterity and the estranged other of the imperialist mindset drove the development of two further tropes that have defined science fiction: the exploration of outer space and the image of the extra-terrestrial that inhabits this

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[172] Seed, *Anticipations*, p. x.

[173] Hanegraaff, 'Globalization of Esotericism', p. 79.

[174] Roberts, *Science Fiction*, p. 16 (my emphasis). Cf. Csicsery-Ronay, p. 147; Broderick, *Reading by Starlight*, p. 49.

extra-planetary zone. Both tropes have been integral to SF, both as a genre and as a way of thinking and experiencing on a planet that, as a result of rapid technological development and astronomical discovery, has begun in recent centuries to think seriously about the planetary civilisations with which it might share the universe, as well as how it might go if they managed a visit. Speculation regarding extra-planetary geography and anthropology had already been underway for centuries before the period with which I am concerned, often generating science fictional accounts of space exploration as it did so.[175] As a result of developments in astronomy, optics, and physics in the nineteenth century this speculation only increased, though the regions beyond Earth remained largely inaccessible and mysterious, resulting in a state of knowledge regarding astrophysics and alien life in which the reincarnation theories of Camille Flammarion could be validly enfolded within his astronomical essays. To conclude my analysis of some of the central tropes and stylistics which science fiction has formed as a result of its various encounters with occultism, I would like to assess the manner in which both SF and traditions like Spiritualism and Theosophy occupied this pre-paradigmatic knowledge space, joining astronomy, geology, and physics in a web of intersecting speculations about the universe and its denizens.

Outer space was, like the mind, a common location in which esoteric thinkers discovered magical causalities, occult forces, and spiritised forms of matter, thus challenging dominant scientific views regarding the very fabric of existence. These competing ontologies could take a variety of forms. Most refused to accept that existence ends at the boundary of the observable, material world. The very possibility of astral or spirit travel entailed belief in realms or planes existing alongside or entangled with material reality. Building on longstanding esoteric theories regarding a physical state between matter and spirit, nineteenth-century occultists innovated a variety of similar mediating agents. Corelli's 'human electricity', Britten's 'Force', and the 'soul-electricity' or Fohat of Blavatsky,[176] are all examples of spirito-physical novums intended to bridge natural and supernatural. Each is framed within the wider context of religious applications of ether physics.[177] Occultists joined physicists like Lodge and Crookes in theorising the ether as 'an all-pervading, universal, invisible substance, linking all the universe'.[178] It was often via the waves and rivulets of ether that psychic forces and fluids enabling thought-transference and spirit communication were thought to travel.

Mimicking and reflecting these alternate, spiritualised concepts of matter, science fiction writers imagined a variety of alternative astronomies. For example, both Pope's *Journey to Mars*

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[175] See Roberts, 'Copernican Revolution', pp. 6–8; Dunér.
[176] Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled*, I, 187–88.
[177] Asprem, *Problem of Disenchantment*, p. 208.
[178] Asprem, 'Parapsychology', p. 142.

and Gratacap's *Certainty of a Future Life in Mars* describe channels of etheric fluid clearly devolved from occultist applications of ether physics, such as Sinnett's belief that the higher elements of the human intended for reincarnation 'pass from world to world' on 'subtle' etheric currents.[179] In Pope's novel, this stream of ether makes hyperspeed travel possible, in Gratacap's it enables inter-planetary communication and spirit transmission. For both authors, the enhanced capabilities of occult space provided opportunity for the enchantments of estrangement, while still affecting the verisimilitude of scientific cognition.

Spiritualist conceptions of worlds made up of spiritual matter and populated by spirit beings were also of interest to early SF. P.B. Randolph's vision of extra-planetary space is a particularly striking example of Spiritualist astronomy. Randolph testified to an experience in which his spirit travelled past Earth's stratosphere and encountered 'vast and continuous streams of highly rarefied, highly sublimated and electrical matter — what may in fact be called the *soul* or spirit of material substances' flowing out from the surface of the Earth. This current, he found, forms a sphere around the Earth, and it is on the surface of this sphere that we find the first home of spirits after death, where 'man resides for a term proportioned to his mental, moral and psychal growth'. This spirit land exists within the natural universe, though 'its material differs from matter as we know it' and thus does not obstruct light or cosmic bodies such as meteors. Yet, 'the surface of that electro-æthic zone is far more diversified than the earth, with multitudinous seas, rivers of living water, brooks, hills, vales, cities, towns, etc. […] only on an immeasurably vaster and more sublime scale.'[180]

Such straight-forward, documentary accounts of the spirit lands reproduce the extra-planetary exploration narrative of science fiction in themselves, so it is no surprise to discover similar occult ontologies in SF of the period. Astor's *Journey in Other Worlds* uses the astral travel of the Saturnians to explore the extent of the universe. A psychically powerful Saturnian, the spirit of an American bishop, discovers a giant hell planet beyond the orbit of Neptune, complex solar systems with millions of exoplanets, and an enormous star at the centre of the universe called 'Cosmos'. What is perhaps most striking, however, is the bishop's description of further systems 'beyond this visible universe' inhabited only by more evolved spirits (pp. 398–401). While these systems are part of the physical cosmos, they are also 'entirely different in many respects' (p. 398), and the spirits of Saturn cannot access them. Astor's novel thus makes explicit the tension between mundanity and alterity on which SF thrives, a tension that is also implicit in Randolph's account of a material spirit world both similar to Earth and radically different from it. True to the unspoken rules of science fiction's balance between realism and alterity, both the

[179] Sinnett, *Esoteric Buddhism*, p. 31.
[180] Randolph, *"Ghostly Land"*, pp. 16–18.

known and the unknown — or the to-be-known — are established as epistemological territories into which the narrative must forge in order to emerge successfully with its science fictional blend of fact, fiction, and enchantment.

SF and occultism reflected this same tension between mundanity and alterity when imagining the beings that might inhabit other planets. In both traditions, the extra-terrestrial has spanned the spectrum between these two poles. As Gregory Benford notes, the alien is a fundamental aspect of science fiction's encounter with alterity — it balances SF's 'desire for certainty with the irreducible unknown'.[181] However, since speculation regarding the likelihood of other inhabited planets increased following the establishment of the Copernican system and the telescopic advances of Galileo,[182] many have imagined aliens that are little more than transplanted humans. From Swedenborg to *Star Trek*, visions of extra-planetary civilisations have often featured beings with largely the same concerns and lifestyle as humans, and with largely the same appearance, though with physical characteristics and abilities shaped by particular planetary conditions.[183] Stephen R.L. Clark argues that this was the dominant post-Enlightenment approach to life on other planets until the twentieth century.[184] Nineteenth-century SF frequently supports Clark's view. Pope, for example, in the preface to a novel in which the greatest variations on the mundane human are a range of psychic powers, argued that because humanity was created in the image of God, any being incarnated on another planet must 'always be the same […] in essential Being and Nature' (*Journey to Mars*, p. v). The projection of the human into outer space could thus be aimed at normativity, at denying the possibility of otherness — on the level of being and ontology at least — in other forms of intelligent life.

Others were more interested in imagining what lay beyond the human. Whiting argued that there must be 'many probable forms […] which eye hath not seen, nor the heart of man conceived'.[185] 'The Inhabitant' describes an encounter between a lone Earthman and two Venusians of an ambiguously insectoid origin in *The Great Romance*. In his introduction to this latter novel, Dominic Alessio, following John Pierce, argues that this is an exception in interplanetary fiction prior to the Martians of Wells's *The War of the Worlds*, which otherwise populated exoplanets with beings that were essentially human.[186] This identification of *War of the*

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[181] Benford, p. xiii.

[182] See Dunér, esp. pp. 451–52; Crowe, 'Astronomy and Religion', pp. 210–11; Roberts, *History of Science Fiction*, pp. 49–53.

[183] Swedenborg concluded, for theological reasons, that despite some variation in appearance and ability, inhabitants of all planets must be essentially human. See *Arcana Coelestia*, no. 9237. Cf. Dunér, pp. 470–73.

[184] Clark, p. 97.

[185] Whiting, p. 3.

[186] Alessio, pp. xxxi–xxxvii. Cf. Pierce, p. 93.

Worlds as the ur-text of SF's alien trope is common among SF critics.[187] To a degree this reflects the tendency to see SF as a twentieth-century innovation, but it is also the result of the general de-occultation of the genre. Regardless of whether we view the modern alien as a product of ineffability or of empiricist deduction — and I am arguing that we should view it, much like science fiction proper, as the result of an uncomfortable, yet productive, tension between the two — the prioritisation of *War of the Worlds* completely overlooks the important place of extra-terrestrial spirit beings in the early SF mega-text.

Aliens of etheric or spiritual essence played a central role in transitioning the figure of the extra-terrestrial from something normatively human to the creature of non-human alterity that has frequently appeared in both science fiction and alternative religious movements in the last century. A complex blend of mesmerist, Swedenborgian, Spiritualist, and Theosophical perceptions produced a vision of extra-terrestrial beings that evolved into progressively posthuman lifeforms as they ascended through ever more attenuated spheres of spiritual matter or reincarnated on different planets. Speculation regarding the results of these processes of evolution and reincarnation produced imagined beings that began to look and act less familiar, though they often retained an aura of the human. Anglo-American Spiritualist ideas were contextually important here, particularly when envisioning spirit bodies. As reported through a medium to Robert Hare by the spirit of his father, the spirits were 'possessed of definite, tangible, and exquisitely symmetrical forms'. These bodies were apparently quite human in shape, with 'well-rounded and graceful limbs', but they possessed posthuman abilities such as the power to 'glide through the atmosphere with almost electric speed', and were of a higher degree of etheric matter.[188]

It was in France, however, where mesmerists and Martinists noted somnambules describing the reincarnation of the soul on other inhabited planets, that the most important esoteric strands of extra-terrestrial representation were spun.[189] In this context, the Spiritism of Allan Kardec asserted that the spirit reincarnated into new physical bodies on other planets, depending on the soul's level of evolutionary progression.[190] Kardec did not have many devotees in the English-speaking world, but he counted Countess Caithness and Anna Kingsford among his admirers, both of whom contributed to acceptance of reincarnation by some Anglo-American Spiritualists.[191] As a result of Kingsford's influence on early developments in the Theosophical Society, Kardec also likely contributed to Theosophy's cosmic scheme of individual, species, planetary, and galactic

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[187] See, e.g., Gomel, *Science Fiction*, p. 2; Mendlesohn, Preface to *Aliens in Popular Culture,* p. xi.
[188] Hare, *Experimental Investigation*, p. 93. Cf. Ferguson, 'Eugenics and the Afterlife', p. 70.
[189] Hammer, pp. 461–62.
[190] On Kardec and his 'Spiritism' see Oppenheim, p. 170; Hammer, pp. 462–64.
[191] Godwin, *Theosophical Enlightenment*, pp. 340–42; Hammer, pp. 464–65.

evolution.[192] As in Spiritism, Theosophy taught that the higher aspects of the human evolved through a process of continual reincarnation on other planets. Importantly, what Sinnett called the 'different conditions of material and spiritual development' were a vital aspect of this inter-planetary evolution.[193] In other words, it was not assumed that reincarnation would always take place in human form.

As a number of SF historians have noted, these ideas came to early mega-textual fruition in the fiction of Camille Flammarion, where the Frenchman's interests in astronomy and Spiritist evolution combined in novels like *Lumen* and *Uranie* (1889) to imagine spirits reincarnated into a variety of alien life forms. Flammarion was thus able to fictionalise his spirito-astronomical speculation that once-human spirits on other worlds might inhabit 'forms we [are] not even able to imagine'.[194] These representations of the extra-terrestrial — both physically and ontologically 'other' to the material human — seem to have had a significant influence on Anglophone SF writers, including Wells and Stapledon.[195] Flammarion's fiction may also have influenced Corelli's depictions of spirit societies on other planets in the solar system, as well as *The Martian*, where du Maurier, a Francophile, describes Martia as having gone through 'countless incarnations', finally reaching the highest life form on Mars, an amphibious creature similar to a seal (p. 376).

We do not need to trace influences to Flammarion to explain this development of the evolved spirito-material extra-terrestrial, however. It can be found, as we have seen, in a number of occult traditions in the period, and in a variety of other SF texts as well. Stableford points out that Flammarion himself saw precedent for his novels in Marie-Anne de Roumier's *Voyages de Mylord Céton dans les sept planètes* (*The Voyages of Lord Ceton to the Seven Planets*, 1765), which also makes extensive use of the concept of human souls reincarnating on other worlds.[196] The concept was also discoverable in Humphry Davy's *Consolations in Travel; or, the Last Days of a Philosopher* (1830), which relates a cosmology in which humans move up through a number of increasingly elevated spiritual incarnations as extra-terrestrials on other planets.[197]

These texts likely played a role in both the development of later occult systems of planetary reincarnation and in continued science fictional interest in the spirit alien. Some SF texts of the nineteenth century continued to reflect beliefs that lifeforms on other planets would be mundanely human. In Gratacap's *Certainty of a Future Life in Mars*, for example, though spirits arrive on Mars in insubstantial form, over time they become receptive to gravity and a process of

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[192] Hammer, p. 464; Oppenheim, pp. 170–71.

[193] Sinnett, *Esoteric Buddhism*, p. 29. On Theosophy's impact on the UFO traditions of the twentieth century and following, see Partridge, I, 174–84; Mayer, p. 1141.

[194] *Les terres du ciel* (1877), qtd. from Mayer, p. 1141.

[195] Stableford, Introduction to *Lumen*, p. xiii; Silverberg, pp. x–xi; Suvin, *Victorian Science Fiction*, p. 44.

[196] Stableford, Introduction to *Lumen*, p. xix.

[197] See ibid. pp. xxi–xxi; Roberts, *History of Science Fiction*, p. 112.

'solidification' occurs in which 'these spirit forms slowly concrete into beings like terrestrial men and women' (p. 80). In the interim period before a more physical body takes shape, arriving spirits are made up of the 'ethereal fluid' of the epistemologically othered spirit-matter of occultism (p. 77). Their 'physiology and morphology', says Dodd Sr, are not an 'easy thing to grasp or define' (p. 79).

Other texts also find alterity in the spirit being. Just as Britten's Chevalier discovers a tension between accessibility and ineffability in the natural laws of the spirit world, so he discovers beings inhabiting the Sun that are both 'sunny-haired' and 'blue-eyed', suggestive of Northern European humans, yet also, 'tall and elastic […] with slender, majestic forms [and] vast, globe-like heads' (p. 202). In this latter picture the Sun-beings become otherworldly and non-human. Their 'globe-like' heads even seem to presage the enormous cranium of the 'grey alien' frequently described by those claiming alien encounters.[198] This tension between normalcy and alterity is also captured by Astor's depiction of the Saturnian spirits. The Saturnians are invisible to the human eye, but this is a result of the limitation of human senses. They are still material beings, though of a more ethereal substance. At times gravity seems to affect their spirit bodies, as Astor's astronauts see footprints being formed around them. The bishop tells Astor's astronauts that the tools of occult empiricism — clairvoyance, astral travel, and other research tools of the experiencing mind — are required to see these spirits and understand their realm, though, the bishop assures them, 'scarcely any degree of evolution could develop your sight sufficiently' (pp. 383–84). Indeed, one of the astronauts is soon struck into a hypnotic state which liberates his psychic senses so that he can see 'spots of phosphorescent light that coincided with the relative positions of the brains, hearts, and eyes of human beings' (p. 428). The Saturnians, in other words, are spirit beings of incomprehensible otherness, but their alterity is resolvable to mundanity with the tools of occult empiricism.

A similar dynamic appears in John Mastin's *Through the Sun in an Airship* (1909), where a group of scientists discover an Earth-like planet hidden beneath the outer surface of the sun, but initially find the planet uninhabited. As weeks of observation pass however, each member of the party begins to see beings that are 'not human and not inhuman but a kind of glorified "essence" […] out of focus, tangible and yet ethereal' (p. 240). Each member of the group initially fears that their minds have grown weak and subject to hallucination, but eventually it becomes clear that everyone is seeing 'ghosts'. One member of the party floats the theory of shared telepathic

[198] See Kripal, *Mutants and Mystics*, pp. 45, 61. Britten may have derived this idea of the outsized alien skull from *The Coming Race*. Tish, speaking 'as a phrenologist,' describes the skulls of the Vril-ya as 'much more pronounced than that of ideality' (pp. 88–89). Kripal notes that Bulwer-Lytton's description suggests 'the oblong, tall skulls of what would become the classic Gray' (*Mutants and Mystics*, p. 45).

impression with which psychical researchers from Bulwer to the SPR explained paranormal experiences, but the view that seems to hold sway is that of a researcher named Rutherford, who argues 'that beings are here […] real spirits, of a far higher grade than ourselves!' (247). The reason these extra-terrestrials are seen only fleetingly and 'out of focus' is the very tension between ineffability and potential for empirical observation that lies at the root of SF's development of the extra-terrestrial. Noting that humans usually envision entities like angels and spirits in human form 'because of [the] incapacity of the human mind to grasp the idea of higher beings' (p. 246), Rutherford argues, like Astor's bishop, that elevated powers of human perception would allow observation of the Sun-beings in their true form. This is why the party has viewed these extra-terrestrial spirits only 'in that peculiar psychical moment when our brain is at its zenith of concentration. […] They are beyond our ken, except in the rare moments when we, mentally, get nearer their level' (p. 247). Rutherford does not specifically describe the ethereal inhabitants of the Sun as human spirits, but he does connect this unknown, superior world to the human afterlife. Here too then, the occultist conflation of ineffable spirituality and empirically accessible (though ethereal) materiality generates an early conception of intergalactic encounter with humanity's other.

The spirit alien has had an enormous effect on science fiction, both as a genre and as a framework through which modern humans imagine and experience encounters with beings from other planets. Some of these influences are direct. Ray Bradbury peoples Mars with spirits in several of the stories that make up *The Martian Chronicles* (1950), including 'The Third Expedition' (originally 'Mars is Heaven!') and 'Night Meeting'.[199] Alien beings in science fiction can be sublimated, extra-dimensional entities that have evolved beyond a nature comprehensible to the physical world. The 'sublimed' civilisations of Banks's *Culture* series are a carefully secularised example of this, while the 'prophets', or 'wormhole aliens', of *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* (1993–99) are situated in a naturalistically metaphysical terrain similar to that of early SF and occultism. These non-corporeal beings do not inhabit physical space; in order to communicate with the Bajorans, a physical race that views them as gods, the prophets must enter a body, just as Spiritualists believed the entities of other realms to possess a medium. The spirit alien's most pronounced influence on science fiction, however, was on the thematic level I have discussed — in the role it played in shifting our extra-terrestrial imaginaries from normative humans to profoundly alien and often superior extra-planetary beings.

In theorising and advocating mind powers like clairvoyance and astral travel, nineteenth-century occultism provided science fiction with the keys to a light-speed vehicle that could

[199] See Burt, p. 169.

explore the extent of outer space. SF, in turn, provided narrative elements with which mediums and other occult visionaries could frame further encounters with extra-terrestrial beings and civilisations. These tropes, along with the ludic, heterotopian, and reanimating principles with which they were established — as well as the appeals to scientific discourse, epistemology, and method which have sustained their verisimilitude — have continued to dialogue with the network of occultism *and* with the ever-fluctuating SF mega-text.

Conclusion: occultism and 'science-fictionality'

Both occult-infused SF and science fictionally presented occultism have surpassed mega-textual and intertextual networks. From its important developmental stages in the nineteenth century, occult science fiction has helped to shape the way in which individuals, indeed entire cultures, encounter the unknown and the unexplained, particularly when such incomprehensible phenomena are located in the mind, in outer space, or in the future. SF critics have persuasively argued that science fiction, in an age of ever more rapid technologisation and scientific advancement, has become what Csicsery-Ronay calls '*science-fictionality*, a mode of response that frames and tests experiences as if they were aspects of a work of science fiction'.[200] For Csicsery-Ronay this mode of response is a way of 'entertaining incongruous experiences, in which judgment is suspended, as if we were witnessing the transformations happening to, and occurring in, us.'[201] SF scholars have, unsurprisingly, been most interested in this phenomenon in terms of how the subject encounters rapid technological change, but science fiction has also been instrumental in providing explanatory structures for experiences perceived as religious or paranormal.

A relationship between real-world encounters and fictional tropes, events, and character experiences began to be explored, not coincidentally, as esoteric movements like Spiritualism and Theosophy emerged in the nineteenth century. As I described in Chapters Two and Four, mental physiologists like Carpenter, Braid, and Beard relied on the suggestibility of the mind to argue that occult phenomena were hallucinations rather than actual events. Describing the 'self-deception' that he believed to take place during séances, Carpenter argued that through a 'monotony of impression' mediums, mesmerists, and other occult operators could prepare the minds of others for an experience that 'takes place subjectively, that is, in the belief of the person or persons who report it — without any objective reality'.[202] Later scholars have observed that while such

[200] Csicsery-Ronay, p. 2. Cf. Luckhurst, *Science Fiction*, p. 10.
[201] Csicsery-Ronay, p. 3.
[202] Carpenter, *Mesmerism, Spiritualism*, p. 112.

preparation can help produce the effect Carpenter described, it is not required: the expectations that define such experiences are shaped by a variety of previously encountered narrative frameworks — found in sources from sacred texts to romance novels — that provide explanatory mechanisms when the subject encounters a radically unfamiliar experience.[203]

As we saw in the case of authors like Corelli and Dick, such encounters can be framed by the tropes and expectations of science fiction and can, in turn, generate them. SF is not the only cultural form able to sustain such a dialectic of art and experience; elsewhere, for example, I have illustrated the reflexive exchange between the occult experiences of the Inkling Charles Williams and his seven novels of supernatural fantasy.[204] It is worth asking, however, if science fiction is uniquely suited to mediate encounters with incomprehensible and uncontainable phenomena, from UFOs to the catastrophic enormity of climate change.

There are grounds to make just such an argument. We have seen that science fiction encounters alterity and ineffability in a unique manner, maintaining the potential for terror and sublimity in the alien, while simultaneously attempting to reduce it to familiarity. It separates itself from other forms of the fantastic by attempting to make the unreal and supernatural seem verisimilar, offering a space in which to encounter paranormal experiences that is analogous to their dream logic and imaginal mechanisms, but which simultaneously shapes them into an apparently logical or rational structure. Science fiction is, as many theorists have observed, a mythos suitable to the priorities and knowledge frameworks of techno-scientific societies.[205] It thus provides a mythical structure laden with tropes, imagery, and guiding epistemologies that are more consistent with the contemporary episteme than materials from earlier periods. Modern experiences that prove overwhelming or incomprehensible can be placed inside this framework in order to image the encounter with the ineffable, the unknown, and the sublime; to tame and manage it both emotionally and intellectually.

Whatever the degree of exceptionality we can attribute to science fiction's ability to mediate incomprehensible encounter in general, it is certainly well-suited to manage, explain, and communicate the experiences generated within occultist and other alternative religious environments. Because its genre-defining reproductions of scientific discursivity, epistemology, and method have been heavily impacted by its entanglements with occultism, it serves as a ready repository of scientifically verisimilar explanatory mechanisms. Science fiction thus constitutes one of several cultural forms which Kripal has described as providing a ready framework to inform

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[203] See, e.g. Popp-Baier, pp. 13–17; Bender, pp. 201–18.

[204] Roukema, pp. 106–50.

[205] See, e.g., Clareson, 'Other Side of Realism', p. 1; Parrinder, *Science Fiction*, pp. 49–54; Robertson, pp. 32–58.

modern religious experiences in which, as a result of constant engagement with popular culture, we are 'reading and writing ourselves'.[206] Both Kripal and Broderick have examined this reciprocal relationship between paranormal experience and science fiction in the case of Dick, an author 'drenched in sf imagery'.[207] When reaching for a symbol set with which to communicate his experiences and emotions, 'he found the perfect correlative to his inner states in just that kind of fanciful mutation of external reality he and his colleagues had formulated as science fiction idioms'.[208]

It was the SF mega-text, in other words, that provided Dick with the imagery and narrative framework he required to process the incomprehensibility of 2-3-74. In general, SF's tropes and stylistics have played a crucial role in framing religious experience and developing belief systems in the last 150 years. Science fiction's tropes and stylistics have had little impact on established religions, but SF's particular manner of shaping the supernatural in naturalistic and scientifically verisimilar forms has frequently proven useful for founders of new religious movements. Recent scholarship has profiled the development of science fictional religions, from the Church of All Worlds, founded after a religious group designed by Robert Heinlein in *Stranger in a Strange Land* (1961), to Jediism and Matrixism, largely internet-based religious communities whose adherents have adopted the fictional credos and cosmologies of *Star Wars* and *The Matrix* respectively.[209] Scientology, founded by SF author L. Ron Hubbard, and UFO religions like the Raëlian Church, founded by 'Raël' (Claude Vorilhon), fall into a less self-reflexively ironic category, as their adherents usually do not see their movement's myth structures as fictional. Whether factual or not, however, narratives like Hubbard's 'Myth of Xenu' or Rael's *Extra-Terrestrials Took Me To Their Planet* (1975), a description of his journey to the planet of the Elohim, a race of aliens which Raëlians believe to be genetically controlling human development, certainly seem, to borrow a phrase from Stephen Clark, to fall into the category of 'religious dreams that take shape in science fiction'.[210]

As Carole Cusack observes, science fiction's pre-eminence as a modern myth-form 'makes it the most likely narrative form to generate creative, new invented religions'.[211] Crucially, however, religion founders like Hubbard and Raël have not simply adopted the tropes and rhetorics of some sort of modern, secular mode of fiction into a religious environment. Rather, they have excavated elements of imagery and plot from the SF mega-text that were already formed from an

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[206] Kripal, *Mutants and Mystics*, p. 304.
[207] Broderick, *Transrealist Fiction*, p. 134.
[208] Ibid.
[209] See, e.g., Cusack, pp. 54–62, 120–32; Partridge, I, 138–41; Kirby, pp. 44–58.
[210] Clark, p. 108. For useful background on the Raëlian Church see Chryssides, pp. 45–61.
[211] Cusack, p. 146.

inextricable blend of religious and scientific priorities. As I have shown time and again in this dissertation, movements like mesmerism, Spiritualism, and Theosophy played a central role in establishing the science fictional frameworks with which individuals like Dick, Hubbard, and Raël encountered the very supernormal that these occultist traditions set out to explore in the first place. The influence of occultism's adaptation of a variety of supernatural and spiritual phenomena, upgraded to create a cognitive effect for the enframed mind, can be found in all times and all places where science fiction has established itself as genre, mode, or way of thinking and experiencing.

Why then has this occult presence been so little observed? If SF continues to benefit from its formative relationship with modern esoteric rhetorics and logics, still deploying occult tropes, concepts, and explanatory mechanisms to this day, how could so many insightful critics look past this entanglement, or even, like Suvin, deny it entirely? I have already suggested, following Bould and Vint, that a good part of the answer to this question lies in ideology, in a prescriptive desire that SF be a particular form with specifically secular priorities and structures. Building from this, however, I propose another, less accusatory explanation, one that finds the obscuration of occultism in largely unconscious, intertextual shifts in perspectives on what SF is and does. This explanation describes not so much the de-occultation of SF claimed by figures like Gernsback and Wells, but an occlusion of its magical roots, a prestidigitation in which the occult mechanics of various tropes, themes, and logics were hidden inside the magic cabinet of the science fiction writer, made to play a central, functioning role in a disappearing act effected by expert manipulation of smoke and mirrors, an act in which the occult materials that made the trick possible were themselves its target of disappearance.

As we have seen, early SF authors were not afraid to give equal representation to each partner in SF's marriage of magic and science. Authors like Bulwer, Britten, and Corelli, in fact, turned to science fiction to emphasise or even proselytise occultist concepts. This sort of extroverted representation of esoteric phenomena became rare in science fiction, though it has continued to occur in texts like Robert Anton Wilson and Robert Shea's *Illuminatus!* trilogy (1975), or Alejandro Jodorowsky's graphic novel series, *The Incal* (1980–2014). This does not mean that occult materials exerted any less of an influence in SF as the mega-text continued to evolve. However, later SF would shrink the epistemological space in which spectrums between magic and science, supernatural and natural, spiritual and physical could be explored. The esoteric roots of science fiction began to be occluded as the mode continued to develop in the twentieth century, particularly following the genre-forming actions of Wells and Gernsback. Movements like mesmerism, Spiritualism, and Theosophy had lost even the shreds of scientific credibility they had once possessed, and were thus less useful for establishing verisimilitude, but SF also came to

align itself more purposefully with a secular mindset, eschewing — at least on the surface of things — religious motivations and ontologies.

However, even this shift to a secularisation and materialisation of once magical or supernatural phenomena should be seen as part of the heritage of the intersection between SF and occultism. Throughout this dissertation we have seen that esoteric thinkers themselves degaussed the magical and supernatural aspects of occult science, insisting on their naturalism and empirical legitimacy, and even arguing that phenomena like telepathy and clairvoyance were the future technologies of scientific inquiry. In doing so they helped lay the groundwork for the enfolding of the magical and paranormal into apparently empiricist and secular frameworks. A clear example of this balancing act is Corelli's presentation of the magical science of Morgana, both a brilliant scientist and a 'fey' elemental being — a Morgana Le Fay, in other words, of the twentieth century. Noticing that her manipulation of the occult 'secret power' astounds her colleagues, Morgana anticipates Clarke's equation of 'sufficiently advanced technology' with magic: 'It mystifies you I can see! You think it is a kind of "black magic"? Not so! — unless all our modern science is "black magic" as well' (*SP*, p. 93). This reverse Clarkean principle so fully conflates the magical and the scientific that even Edison is represented as a 'tireless magician' (*SP*, p. 118). The entire spectrum of knowledge and method between poles of magic and science is validated in the process.

As I have illustrated throughout, some of science fiction's central tropes and narrative modes have continued to emerge from, and be sustained by, occult scientific concepts and hypotheses proposed within this generative spectrum. Psi powers, instantaneous travel, and extra-terrestrials are examples of concepts that appear to be imaginative extensions of scientific thought and culture because of how we have been prepared to receive them, but which also continue to contain the occult elements which were genetically embedded in their process of formation. While most SF texts do not acknowledge this heritage, occult elements can be found explicitly included in science fiction, even in some of its most canonical texts. Frank Herbert's approach to incorporating occult concepts is actually quite similar to Corelli's, as he introduces the Bene Gesserit of *Dune*, practitioners of an ancient science of magic and psychical power, as a secretive order of 'witches'.

Arthur C. Clarke takes a similar tack in his presentation of a rapid evolution of humanity in *Childhood's End* (1953). A race of aliens called the Overlords has been entrusted by an entity they call the 'Overmind' with the task of shepherding humanity through a phase of rapid psychical advancement. Humanity will transcend 'the tyranny of matter' to join with the 'many races' that make up the Overmind (p. 177), similar to the telepathically amalgamated entity of Stapledon's *Starmaker*. This evolution, the Overlords eventually reveal, is the culmination of 'the testimony of five thousand years' regarding 'strange phenomena — poltergeists, telepathy, precognition' (176).

Science, the Overlords note, had ignored these things, eschewing superstition and faith. It was 'your mystics, though they were lost in their own delusions', who saw 'the powers of the mind, and powers beyond the mind, which your science could never have brought within its framework without shattering it entirely' (pp. 175–76). Indeed, out of all human knowledge ever produced, the Overlords, who are not themselves capable of this psychical leap, most value that which merges the methods of science with the shadowy knowledge of mysticism, thus revealing humanity's latent mental power. An Overlord named Rashaverak is found going through an occultist's private library, much interested in 'almost everything of importance that had ever been published on the nebulous subjects of magic, psychic research, divining, telepathy, and the whole range of illusive phenomena lumped in the category of paraphysics' (p. 74). Clarke thus recreates both occultism's valuation for subjective testimonies of paranormal experience and its recasting of ancient knowledge as future science. It is not space technology and atomic bombs that mark a new age for humanity, but paraphysical sciences rooted in the heritage of mesmerism, mediumship, and psychical research. The Overlords make what is for them the blindingly obvious observation that 'any theory of the universe' must account for powers of the mind (and beyond) if it is to be complete (p. 176). Nineteenth-century occultists would have found this similarly self-evident.

As SF has begun again, beginning in the latter half of the twentieth century, to return to the level of hybridity found in earlier periods, such overt deployment of the trappings of esoteric science has become more common. China Miéville's *Perdido Street Station* (2000) is a revealing example of this hybridity, one which deploys a variety of occult sciences, many of them specific to the nineteenth-century, in a steam-punk otherworld London illuminated by retro ether physics, a necromantic alchemy called 'necrochymistry', and the 'automatic', machinic summoning of demons (pp. 30, 338–39). A 'materio-thaumaturgic' force, very like the fluids and forces theorised by occultists in the shadow of mesmerism, is the basis of the physics of Bas-Lag, the world of *Perdido Street Station* and its sequels, *The Scar* (2002) and *Iron Council* (2004). It joins phlogiston, an element theorised in the eighteenth century, and 'thamauturgons', 'enchanted particles' that make shamanism and invocation possible (p. 203), in a litany of proven or hypothesised forces at play in the novel. Most significant is the quest of Miéville's occult scientist main character, Isaac Dan der Grimnebulin, to harness a 'thaumaturgic' force called 'crisis energy' (p. 615) — likely a reference to Mesmer's connection between manipulation of the animal magnetic fluid and the crisis state he sought to trigger in his patients.[212]

[212] See Gauld, p. 13.

This mix of future science and outdated rejected knowledge has been attributed to the hybridity of form deployed by an author who has stated that he finds the 'bleeding of genre edges completely compelling'.[213] Caroline Edwards and Tony Venezia propose that Miéville's generic infusion of fantasy, the gothic and the (new) weird into science fiction is intended partly as a rebuttal to the exclusive rationalism of Suvin's attempts at SF definition, 'challenging the traditional instrumental Marxist reading that elevates SF above fantasy'.[214] In placing nineteenth-century epistemology at the roots of his narrative, however, Miéville attaches more than simply questions of genre to any sense of rebuke in his intentional hybridity. His deployment of lost ('perdido') pre-twentieth-century sciences in the service of generic diffusion would not have been possible without the aggressive exorcism of esoteric knowledge from a number of influential perceptions and definitions of science fiction, from Wells to Suvin. This casting out of demons has long been predicated on the apparent outdatedness of occult concepts, an integral part of their perceived incompatibility with the currents of enframing. Miéville's genre mash-up thus becomes inextricably entwined with what is perhaps the most significant hybridity at play in *Perdido Street Station*: a hybridity of knowledge, ancient and modern, magical and scientific, expanded naturalism and narrowed supernaturalism. In his revivification of abandoned knowledges, Miéville injects into science fiction the naked, exposed forms of ancient, outdated, or rejected concepts that have always been present in the genre. Bas-Lag is not simply a new world populated by tropes filtered from the creative juices squeezed by genre cross-fertilisation; it is a quite purposeful revelation of what has always been nascent in science fiction: occult epistemologies, ontologies, and methods hidden beneath modern scientific shells. Thus, though Miéville's trilogy does, as Luckhurst argues, indicate that SF has never been a pure, contained genre in the manner Suvin envisions,[215] it actually appears less generically hybrid when we take into account the mass of occult-infused science fiction that came before it. Miéville's text, like those of Herbert and Clarke, synthesises occultism with science fiction in a manner similar to authors in the nineteenth century. SF relies on modern esotericism in these novels without complete occlusion, acknowledging the witchcraft (*Dune*), proleptic psychic science (*Childhood's End*), and 'thaumaturgic' elements (*Perdido Street Station*) behind its novums.

In many other texts which reflect an SF mode, however, the process of occlusion is more complete. Even in this majority of cases, however, the very way in which science fiction clarifies itself as a productive tension of fantastic wonder and grounded empiricist knowledge carries the vestigial markings of its engagement with occultism. Regardless of a text's superficial stance

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[213] Qtd. in Edwards and Venezia, p. 6.
[214] Edwards and Venezia, p. 16.
[215] Luckhurst, 'Bruno Latour's Scientifiction', p. 13.

toward esotericism, or the number (often nil) of its direct references to occult phenomena, later SF authors have continued to obscure magical, spiritual, and supernatural elements with the epistemological, discursive, and methodological tools for creating a cognitive effect which the SF mode developed in tandem with occultism.

Let us return, then, to Csicsery-Ronay's description of the science fiction writer as a 'trickster'. He uses the term specifically in terms of the SF author's emulation of 'the language of recognizable science',[216] but the science fiction writer can productively be viewed, in a much wider sense, as a practitioner of the magic of illusionists and stage magicians, another tradition of entertainment defined by its engagement with the occult revival. Like these prestidigitators, the author of science fiction is tasked with enabling the enframed mind to suspend disbelief, and trust, if only briefly, in the possibility of the bizarre, the unknown, and the unexplainable. Just as stage magic developed its tricks, techniques, and marketing strategies in dialogue with the Spiritualist séance and the public display of mediumship,[217] SF writers adopted the methods of scientific legitimation deployed by occultists. The prestidigitation which they have proceeded to perform has presented supernormal phenomena from telepathy to astral travel with a verisimilitude that connects the reader to knowledge acquired through the methods and assumptions of science, and expressed with its particular discursive techniques. Science fiction writers continue to perform this magical obscuration to this day, but its methods were developed in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, as occultism and science fiction grew up together out of older forms and established themselves as modern forms of expression and creativity.

Yet, the way people of twentieth- or twenty-first-century industrial societies have thought about the superhuman, or psychic powers, or the extra-terrestrial has become dislocated from its roots in occultism and psychical research. It has become science fiction. As such, for many under the influence of the swiftly globalising narrative power of SF, perceived encounters with unknown entities, strange mental powers, hallucinatory experiences, and transcendent spaces or realms are encountered through the lens of specific SF narratives or the general myth set of science-fictionality, rather than understood as religious experiences with occultist implications. SF has even colonised the human encounter with the future. Where the science of prediction used to belong to soothsayers, astrologers, and Tarot readers, industrialised societies now tend to see divination as the job of the science fictional imagination. Just as the texts I have discussed in this project — and many others besides — contributed to the science fictionalisation of occultism, so,

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[216] Csicsery-Ronay, p. 127. See pp. 102–06.
[217] See Natale.

conversely, have occult elements been enfolded into SF, thus affecting the very way that moderns approach instances of technological unease, future horror, and epistemological fracture.

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